

Video the Perfectionist's Guide to Fantastic Video Watchdog®


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Jan / Feb 1991




SPECIAL LOST & FOUND ISSUE

GANJA & HESS

The Savaging and Salvaging of an American Classic

 **The Hidden Terrors of**
PUPI AVATI

 **Scenes You've Never Seen!**
ALIENS: SPECIAL EDITION

RARITIES • RETITLINGS • RESTORATIONS



Video Watchdog®

the Perfectionist's
Guide to
Fantastic Video

No. 3
Jan / Feb / 1991

"Everybody's some kind of freak. Everybody I know is into something, you know? You're into horror movies. I can dig it. When it gets too heavy and I can't cut it, believe me, you'll be the first to know. Meanwhile, let's celebrate the Divine Art."

—Bill Gunn, *GANJA & HESS* (1973)

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Inside: Z-Man (John LaZar) prepares to make Lance Rocke (Michael Blodgett) "drink the black sperm of vengeance" in Russ Meyer's *BEYOND THE VALLEY OF THE DOLLS* (1970), now re-rated NC-17! Can re-release be far behind?

Back: The Druid Tree from William Friedkin's *THE GUARDIAN* (MCA Video). Its bark is worse than its bite.

Kennel

LUCAS BALBO has written for SHOCK XPRESS, IMPACT and PSYCHOTRONIC VIDEO. He also operates NOSTALGIA (78 Rue de la Folie-Régnault, 75011 Paris France—a combination publishing company/photo archive—and contributed the Introduction to Horror Pictures' MARIO BAVA 2 booklet.

STEPHEN R. BISSETTE publishes the cutting-edge horror comics anthology TABOO (P.O. Box 442, Wilmington, VT 05363), now in its 4th issue. WE ARE GOING TO EAT YOU!, his excellent and exhaustive survey of cannibal films, is now seeking a publisher.

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CRAIG LEDBETTER recently unveiled the newly-formatted ETC: EUROPEAN TRASH CINEMA, and it's a winner. \$10/4 issues from P.O. Box 5367, Kingwood, TX 77325.

TIM LUCAS is writing a novel based on his acclaimed TABOO serial THROAT SPROCKETS, and is still waiting for his short story "The Room of Presidents" to appear in FEAR, where it was accepted two years ago.

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The Watchdog Barks



HEY SAY THAT 50% of all motion pictures made before 1950 are now lost.

While I don't think anyone honestly expects to find Tod Browning's **LONDON AFTER MIDNIGHT** (1927) in next week's TV GUIDE listings, so-called "lost" films have a way of popping up when you least expect them. In the last decade alone, such long-mourned classics as J. Searle Dawley's **FRANKENSTEIN** (1910, produced by Thomas Edison) and Roland West's **THE BAT** (1925) have resurfaced from oblivion on the underground videocassette market. The sainted UCLA Film Archives has restored **DOCTOR X** (1932) and **MYSTERY OF THE WAX MUSEUM** (1933) to their original two-strip Technicolor glory, while other archivists have busied themselves with the retinting of silent classics like **THE CABINET OF DR. CALIGARI** (1919), Fritz Lang's **SPIDERS** (1919, see "Video Around the World"), and **NOSFERATU** (1922) in accordance with their original exhibition plans. Dennis Doros, formerly of silent specialists Kino on Video, is launching his own video label in early 1991 with a fully restored version of F. W. Murnau's final film, **TABU** (1930). So, on the one hand, it's a great time for—let's go ahead and coin the word—a *vidéaste* to be alive.

On the other hand, who's looking after the films made since 1950? In our last issue, director Joe Dante revealed that MCA Television was unsuccessful in their attempt to locate outtake footage for their expanded tele-version of **AMAZON WOMEN ON THE MOON**—and it's only *three years old*! Everyone reading this editorial probably grew up

reading about the ultra-violent Japanese versions of Hammer Films, but where are *they*? Most of the Hammer titles released to video in Japan have been identical to their American and British counterparts. And what about the original versions of countless European imports released here in butchered form by American International Pictures? As far as we know, the only organization working to untie these particular tangles is... well, you're holding it.

The recovery of lost films, footage, and filmmakers appears to be the theme of this issue of VIDEO WATCHDOG. Our main feature researches the great "lost" horror film of the 1970's—Bill Gunn's **GANJA & HESS** (1973), which thankfully has been saved from extinction by the efforts of a handful of admirers. Though it isn't on video yet, **GANJA & HESS** remains a pertinent subject for VW because a radically re-edited version (**BLOOD COUPLE**, 1975) is widely available on tape. Also examined are CBS/Fox's forthcoming "special edition" laserdisc of James Cameron's **ALIENS** (1986, which restores the epic-length vision pruned for the film's theatrical play dates), and the crepuscular films of Italian *maestro* Pupi Avati which, while not exactly lost, remain almost entirely unavailable to American audiences.

This 3rd issue of VIDEO WATCHDOG is dedicated to the firefighters who saved Universal Studios on the evening of November 6, 1990, diverting an arsonist's flames before they could reach the vaults where the original negatives of countless horror and fantasy classics are stored.

Tim Lucas

Watchdog News

Rhino Pulls Out: No More Inserts for Elvira

As reported in VW #2, Rhino Home Video released the first titles in their "Midnight Madness" series—a handful of sell-through B horror and science fiction movies—last August. Each title was hosted by Elvira, Mistress of the Dark (Cassandra Peterson), who also interrupted each feature with three, five-second inserts. We're pleased to report that, in response to an overwhelming backlash of criticism instigated by Video Vaultkeeper Jim McCabe and publicized in the pages of Charles Kilgore's *ECCO*, Michael Weldon's *PSYCHOTRONIC VIDEO*, and our own VW, Rhino has announced that their next batch of "Midnight Madness" titles—slated for February 1991 release—will be uncut and *uninterrupted*.

"We found that the video collectors who respect and (more importantly, frankly, for us) *support* our releases were very upset by our original decision," acknowledged Rhino publicity director Judith Silinsky. "It's true that we received quite a few letters from fans and collectors, as well as phone calls and some (I think) *appropriately* negative press. But we also heard from retailers, complaining about refunds they'd had to make to complaining customers, which was upsetting to everyone. So the powers-that-be went back to the drawing board and made the decision to cancel

the future use of inserts."

The initial Midnight Madness releases—Edward D. Wood, Jr.'s **NIGHT OF THE GHOULS**, **THE MASK**, **THE HIDEOUS SUN DEMON**, and the Richard Cunha trilogy **FRANKENSTEIN'S DAUGHTER**, **SHE DEMONS**, and **MISSILE TO THE MOON**—will not be recalled but, according to Silinsky, "when our present supply is exhausted, these titles will be replaced on the market with remastered copies, prominently labelled 'Uncut & Uninterrupted.'" The \$19.95 price tag on these SP-mode recordings will remain unaffected.

It's heartening to see that video watchdogs everywhere responded so promptly to the warning signs of impending gloom, but it's even more gratifying to know



that Rhino Home Video can be so responsive to a comparatively modest public outcry in the face of a set marketing strategy. (If this sounds like small potatoes to you, try getting something as simple as an answered letter from one of the major video companies.) The Watchdog commends the folks at Rhino for their practical agility, and looks forward to seeing more of Elvira (who has nothing in common with small potatoes) in her forthcoming presentations of **THE BRAIN FROM PLANET AROUS** (1958) and **THE BRAIN THAT WOULDN'T DIE** (1962) next February, the second of which Rhino will be releasing to video stores uncut and uninterrupted for the first time ever.

Let Me Buy a Video

Remember last issue's coverage of Doris Wishman's **NUDE ON THE MOON** (1960) and Herschell Gordon Lewis' **SUBURBAN ROULETTE** (1967), two of the first three titles in Joe Bob Briggs' "Sleaziest Movies in the History of the World" series? You may recall that the third release was Lewis' **BLOOD FEAST** (1963), but we neglected to mention that Strand VCI Entertainment (the label in question here) originally announced a *fourth* release in the series: Doris Wishman's grisly sex-change opus **LET ME DIE A WOMAN** (1979). The title was withdrawn at the eleventh hour from Strand VCI's release schedule, reportedly due to "poor image quality;" after all, you want to see *every split hair* in those operation scenes, right?

Well, a recent issue of Joe Bob's fanzine **WE ARE THE WEIRD** announced that "Joe Bob Video" is making **LET ME DIE A WOMAN** available for the originally announced price of \$19.95, plus \$3.00 postage. Just pick up the

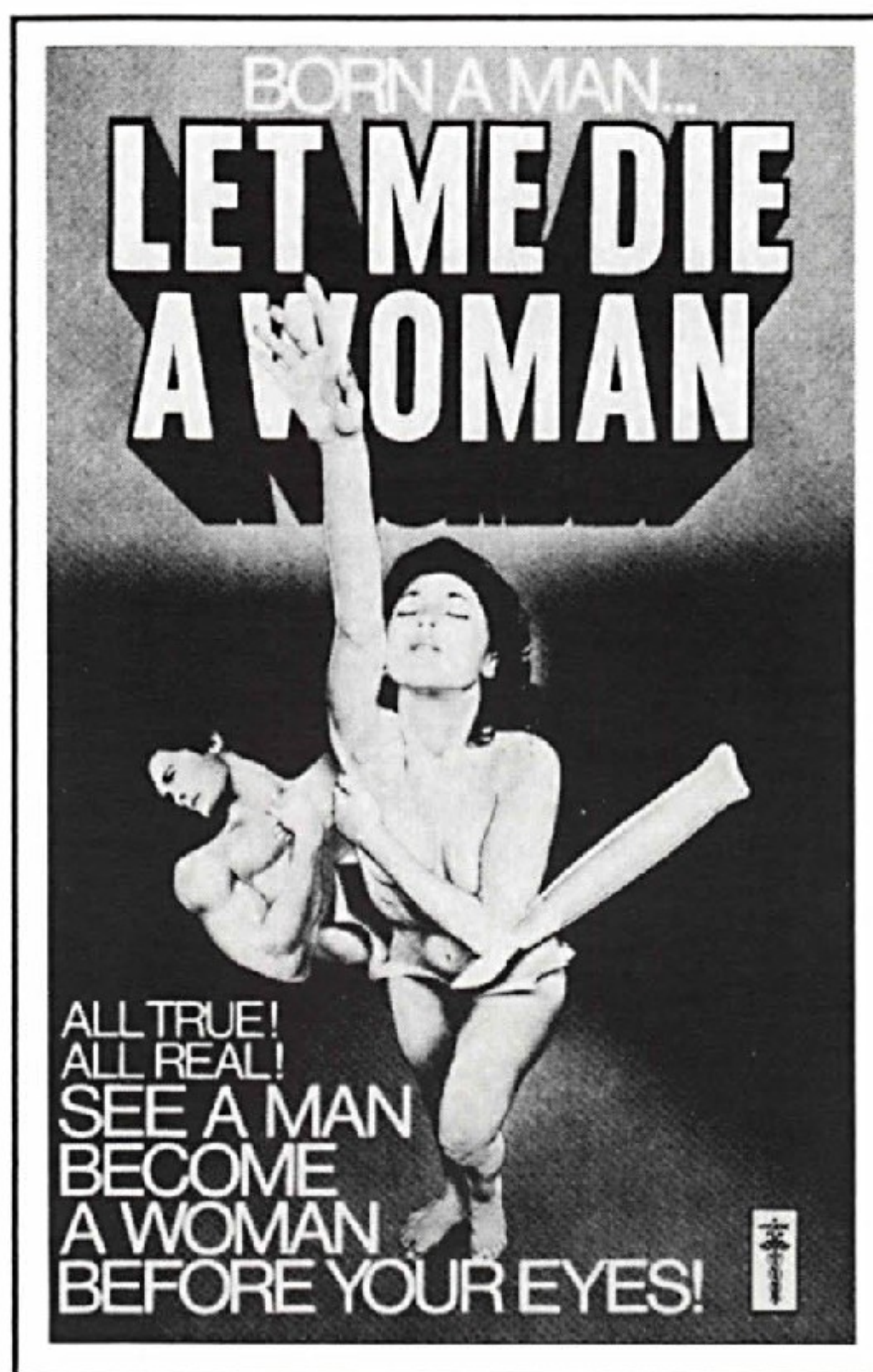
phone and dial 1-800-VIDEO-JB. Despite Strand VCI's official denial of involvement, Joe Bob's operators request that checks be made payable to... aw, you're way ahead of me.

In a letter to Video Vault's Jim McCabe dated October 24, Joe Bob (John Bloom) offered some insight to the situation: "The story on **LET ME DIE A WOMAN** is that Strand VCI considered it 'too grisly for Blockbuster,' so they chickened-out at the last minute. They *will* sell it to anyone claiming to be a subscriber to my newsletter; they just aren't promoting it."

According to Pamela K. Landesberg, a PR spokesman for Strand VCI, the label now admits to making **LMDAW** available—but

only as a bonus offer extended to those buyers who order all six titles in their "Sleaziest" series. They deny that individual orders are being accepted. In response to Joe Bob's allegations concerning Blockbuster Video, Landesberg simply said, "Don't fall for everything you hear. It's not the kind of movie that Blockbuster would be interested in carrying anyway."

On a final, unoccluded note, we're pleased to report that the latest sleazies in the Joe Bob series—H.G. Lewis' **SHE-DEVILS ON WHEELS** (1968) and Wishman's **BAD GIRLS GO TO HELL** (1965) and **DEADLY WEAPONS** (1974)—have been upgraded from their former EP speed to the classy SP-mode.





Add this censored scene to TNT's print of *"Horton Hatches the Egg"* (1942) —NOW you've seen everything!

TOONS TAKE LIVES IN SUICIDE PACT; TED TURNER CONCEALS EVIDENCE

While watching his morning regimen of cartoons on Turner Network Television, VW contributor Bill Kelley was startled to find at least three Robert Clampett Merrie Melodies cartoons which, in the process of being restored by the cable network to their original beauty, had evidently been subjected to gag-ectomies.

"Horton Hatches the Egg" (1942) is Clampett's adaptation of Dr. Seuss' classic children's book, about a warm-hearted elephant who sits on a speckled egg while its flighty mother-to-be whoops it up. At one point in this 9m 41s animated short (a prestige production lasting 2m longer than most WB cartoons), a trio of hunters capture Horton and his egg and take them by boat to America, where they are sold to the circus. The action briefly cuts away from the boat-bound elephant squatting on his egg, to a small fish leaping out of the water in sur-

prise. The fish settles back into the waves, its eyes bulging in a caricature of Peter Lorre. The fish comments in Lorre's voice, "Now I've seen everything!" and then—CUT!—back to the boat! If you're familiar with **"Horton"**, you're probably wondering what happened to the rest of the scene, when the fish produces a revolver from behind its tiny body and shoots itself in the head with a colossal BOOM!

The scene is typical Clampett hyperbole and has nothing to do with Seuss' book, of course, but it's unlikely that literary fidelity was the grounds for this joke's omission.

Over a period of days, Bill noticed similar suicide gags missing from TNT's prints of Clampett's **"An Itch in Time"** (1943) and **"Tortoise Wins by a Hare"** (both 1943). **"Itch"** ends with Elmer Fudd's cat (a precursor of Sylvester) seeing Elmer, his dog, and a flea dancing across the living room floor while singing "Food Around the Corner." The cat says, "Now I've seen everything!", shoots himself, and "That's All, Folks!" The print of

"Itch" now shown on TNT fades-out on the song. **"Tortoise"** is similarly censored at its fade-out; the cartoon is complete through the hunters' shooting of Bugs Bunny (!) as he crosses the finish line in a turtle suit, but excises the punchline as they say in unison, "Now he tells us!" and blow their brains out!

These classic WB cartoons were being shown as recently as two years ago on TNT's parent outlet, the Atlanta SuperStation WTBS, *without* these censor snips—but, of course, that was before parents started taking Heavy Metal stars—a louder form of cartoon—to court. The entertainment world can't be too careful. The Moral of This Story: Tape those Road Runner cartoons while they're still legal!

Parents with stable, trustworthy children can find **"An Itch in Time"** and **"Tortoise Wins By a Hare"** in their original form on various cassette compilations.

French Letters

Farrar-Strauss-Giroux made many a *cinéaste's* dream come true with their recent publication, under the Noonday imprint, of François Truffaut's **CORRESPONDENCE 1945-1984** (\$69.95 hc, \$19.95 pb). Aside from this book's obvious importance and its preservation of a much-missed gentleman's generous heart, it also shows that, while his love for cinema knew no bounds, his patience for the popular Italian cinema certainly did.

In a 1962 letter, Truffaut says of Vittorio Cottafavi—the *auteur* behind **HERCULES & THE CAPTIVE WOMEN**, **GOLIATH & THE DRAGON**—that "he is a director who is probably overestimated by the young [peplum fans], who praise him to the skies, but at the same time underestimated by Ital-



Barbara Steele at the premiere of Fellini's 8½ (1963).

ian producers who force him to make films of pseudo-biblical hokum." Earlier in the book, he castigates a contributor to *CAHIERS DU CINEMA* for hailing Cottafavi as the greatest Italian director since Roberto Rossellini.

Also amusing is Truffaut's meeting with the Queen of Italian Horror, Barbara Steele, which is preceded by a 1963 letter in which he claims to have been "very disturbed, moved, impressed, and influenced by [Fellini's] 8½." Ten years later, he writes a long and descriptive letter about two parties he attended while visiting Los

Angeles. "The first," he writes, "was given by a charming woman, a painter, Barbara Poe, wife of the script-writer James Poe." The fact that he didn't recognize his hostess as one of the lead actors in 8½, one of his great influences, makes one wonder exactly at whom or what else he was looking!

Despite these funny incidents, Truffaut indicates elsewhere that he wasn't always above exploitation thinking. In a letter to a friend concerning the poor boxoffice of *JULES AND JIM* (1961) he writes, "I sometimes wonder whether, in the advertising, we shouldn't ex-

ploit the idea that 'This film has been banned in Spain, Italy, Columbia, Portugal, etc.'"—which just goes to prove that, had he not become the warmest and most humane French filmmaker of his generation, François Truffaut could have peddled Mondo movies with the best of them!

It's an amusing, informative, and touching collection, heartily recommended, particularly for the information it provides on the preparation and logistics behind the *HITCHCOCK/TRUFFAUT* book.

Retitlings

BEASTS (Direct Video, \$39.95) is Eddie Romero's **TWILIGHT PEOPLE**, a yawn-inducing revamping of H.G. Wells' *THE ISLAND OF DR. MOREAU* from 1972. John Ashley is yet-another island-bound hero, and Pam Grier is one of the animal people. Some of its music pops up in Doris Wishman's **DEADLY WEAPONS** (Strand VCI, \$19.95).

BLAZE STARR: THE ORIGINAL (Blaze Video, \$39.95) is Doris Wishman's **BLAZE STARR GOES NUDIST** (1963), the only film to feature the legendary stripper until Lolita Davidovich portrayed her in last year's Touchstone hit **BLAZE**. This film underwent another retitling-of-sorts when its trailer was included on the third volume of Rhino Video's **SLEAZEMANIA**, where it was redubbed **THIS LITTLE GIRL HAD KNOCKERS!** Image quality is bodacious.

CAPTIVE WOMEN (TZ Video, \$N/A), according to advance word, is an English-language version of Jess Franco's *Or-*

gla de Ninfomanas ("Orgy of the Nymphomaniacs," 1977), better known under its German title *Die Nackten Superhexen von Rio Amore* ("The Naked Super Witches of the Rio Amore"). The direction of the German version is credited to "Jack Griffin," the name of the character Claude Rains played in James Whale's **THE INVISIBLE MAN** (1933, a typical Franco in-joke).

THE CHANGELING 2: THE RETURN is a *British* release (label unknown) of Lamberto Bava's *Per Sempre, fino alla morte* ("Forever, Till Death Do Us Part," 1988), a supernatural spin on James M. Cain's **THE POSTMAN ALWAYS RINGS TWICE**, in which two lovers plot to kill the woman's husband. Seven years after the deed is done, their child shows signs of being the vengeful reincarnation of the murdered spouse. Can they kill a child? Made for Italian TV.

CONFESSIONS OF A PEEPING TOM (GWN Video, \$29.95) is a misleading relabeling of Brian DePalma's uproarious **HI, MOM!** (1970), a sequel to 1969's **GREETINGS**, which also starred Robert DeNiro—whom Roger Corman claims to have "discovered" by putting him in **BLOODY MAMA**, made the following year.

CREATED TO KILL (Ace, \$39.95) is Ralph Nelson's **EMBRYO** (1976), in which Rock Hudson plays a genetic scientist who artificially evolves Barbara Carrera in his laboratory. Features a cameo appearance by Dr. Joyce Brothers!

THE DEMON WITHIN (Ace, \$39.95) is the umpteenth reti-

ting of Bernard Girard's **THE HAPPINESS CAGE** (1972), a psychological drama about institutional horrors, which changed its name while still in theaters to **THE MIND SNATCHERS**. With Christopher Walken and Ronny Cox.

EROTISMO (Million Dollar Video, \$N/A) is a Spanish-language version of Jess Franco's *Eugenie* (1980), which bears no resemblance to his earlier **EUGENIE—THE STORY OF HER JOURNEY INTO PERVERSION** [*Les Brulantes*, 1970]. This version stars Katja Bienert, Robert Foster and Carmen Carrion as the prerequisite free-thinking couple, and Lina Romay as their tinsel-wigged family "dog"! Also available in Mexico from Video Casa as *Diario Erotico de una Menor* ("A Minor's Sex Diary," incorrectly credited to Carlos Aured!), and in Germany as *Lolita am Schle-deweg* ("Lolita Spreads Her Legs," in which Eugenie's name is redubbed in smarmy tribute to Nabokov's nymph).

HOSPITAL OF TERROR (World's Worst Videos, \$14.95) is an LP- or EP-speed recording of the Independent International release **NURSE SHERRI** aka **BEYOND THE LIVING** (1978), perhaps the most competent (if not only appreciated) of director Al Adamson's films.

VIOLENT BLOOD BATH (World's Worst Videos, \$14.95) is an LP- or EP-speed recording of Jorge Grau's courtroom crime drama *Pena de Muerte* ("Penalty of Death," 1973), starring Fernando Rey. It has also been shown on the USA Cable Network under its edited-for-television title, **NIGHT FIEND**.

WOMEN'S PENITENTIARY 1-4 (MCM, \$39.98 each) are four different cassettes of mostly-unrelated features pandering to the sequel-minded. The films are, respectively, Jack Hill's **THE BIG DOLL HOUSE** (1971, previously available from Embassy Video) and **THE BIG BIRD CAGE** (1972, also on Warner Home Video), which are semi-related; Gerry de Leon's **WOMEN IN CAGES** (1972, previously on Charter Home Video); and *Blade Vio-lent* (aka **EMMANUELLE REPORTS FROM WOMEN'S PRISON**, 1982, formerly available from Vestron Video as **CAGED WOMEN**) by "Vincent Dawn" (Bruno Mattei).



VW #2 ERRATA

P. 21/27 Paul Nagel did not dub the voice of Rapunzel in a K. Gordon Murray film of the same name, and no such film exists. Either Paul misspoke during his interview, or we misheard him. As he wryly observed upon seeing this error in print, "My voice may be velvety, but it's not *that* velvety."

P. 55-56 **THE CAT O' NINE TAILS** was released by Cinema Video Theater, not Cinema Home Theater.

[Thanks to Lorne Marshall of Glen Burnie, MD for pointing this out.]



Video Around the World

U.S.A.

Your Multi-Standard Menu to Cassette Cuisine

BACK TO THE FUTURE, PART III

1990, MCA Home Video, HF/S/CC, \$89.98

The third and final installment of Robert Zemeckis' epic time travel saga is at once the least intellectual and most eccentric of the series. In an ongoing attempt to re-tie countless loose cosmic ends, Michael J. Fox returns to the Old West to rescue Christopher Lloyd from his recorded death in a showdown, but finds his efforts complicated by Lloyd's romantic involvement with **TIME AFTER TIME** veteran Mary Steenburgen. Lots of wholesome stadium-pleasing touches like fistfights, Bart's burial in another load of manure, and a cameo appearance by ZZ Top. There's a pronounced Spielbergian tendency in the finale to stretch enjoyable suspense into sadistic, nerve-shredding agony. Tips of the Stetson to John Ford and Sergio Leone abound but, for all this inside

auteurisme, one can't help feeling that this movie's heart really belongs to Dale Evans. An unlikely capper to what is likely to remain the most ambitious time-travel story the commercial cinema will produce. Also available on laser-disc in cropped (1.33:1) and matted (1.85:1) versions at \$35.95.

BLOOD SALVAGE

1989, Magnum Entertainment, HF/S, \$89.98

Danny Nelson—the "We Ain't Got Nothin' Better to Do" TV pitchman for Aunt Jane's Pickles—plays a Hooperesque backwoods patriarch whose road salvage work conceals his real dabbling in human salvation, religious and physical, as he traffics in human organs salvaged from

KEY

HF	Hi-Fi
S	Stereo
S-SS	Stereo Surround Sound
CC	Closed Captioned

Compiled by Lucas Balbo (France), Dennis Capicik & Jason Gray (Canada), Craig Ledbetter (Venezuela), Simone Romano (Italy), and the Video Watchdog

unwilling folks with car trouble. A recreation vehicle transporting a typical middle American nuclear family (headed by ever-solid John Saxon and his paraplegic beauty contestant daughter Lori Birdsong) breaks down in the wrong neck of the woods, leading to echoes of **MANSION OF THE DOOMED** and the usual **CHAINSAW** clichés, but all of it presented with an unexpected degree of wit, pathos, and polish. The Atlanta-lensed film is most laudable for the thoughts it leaves the viewer afterwards, as one tabulates the casualties and has to admit that this is that rare movie where most of the characters are gray and the curses are as mixed as most movies would have blessings be. Executive produced by current World Heavyweight Champ Evander Holyfield (who cameos)! Not bad. Also available on laserdisc from Image Entertainment for \$35.95.

THE COOK, THE THIEF, HIS WIFE & HER LOVER

1989, Vidmark, HF/S, \$89.98

The Outstanding Film of 1989 becomes the Outstanding Video release of 1990. Set over a week of evenings in the British French restaurant Le Hollandais, the story attends the luminous but deadly adultery (and its vengeful consequences) of a bookish diner and the brutalized wife of a monstrous London gangster, who gnaws at the viewer from start to finish with the most hateful voice ever recorded. The final moments may be too predictable to cap what's come before in terms of sheer shock value, but every frame of this film (photographed by Sascha Vierny) could hang in a museum; the Michael Nyman score—particularly during the lovers' first meeting—is an instant classic; and the performances of the four

leads (respectively to the title, Michel Gambón, Alan Howard, Helen Mirren and Richard Bohringer) are unforgettable. Vidmark is offering *four* versions of Peter Greenaway's vicious, epicurean masterpiece to the consumer: 1) the uncut, unrated 123m version, letterboxed; 2) the same version cropped with pan and scan; 3) an R-rated, cropped version running 95m (edited without Greenaway's supervision!); and, for those who like to see their butchered editions as they were *meant* to be seen, 4) an R-rated letterboxed version!

THE DEVIL'S MESSENGER

1963, Sinister Cinema, \$22.00 ppd.

In this terror anthology Lon Chaney is Satan, assigning an attempted suicide (Karen Kadler as "Satanya") to lure certain individuals to Hell—positioned directly below downtown Los Angeles!—by presenting them with certain "props." Although the direction is credited to Herbert L. Strock, the three stories were built on outtakes from an unsold Swedish series called NO. 13 DEMON STREET, and likely contains some uncredited work by Curt Siodmak. This film was trounced by juvenile audiences and genre critics when released, but it has aged with unexpected, middling success; the first two storylines are surprisingly mature, dealing frankly with the horrific repercussions of erotic anguish. The first (with John Crawford as a photographer whose prints are haunted by a wraith-like woman he accidentally killed) is best, obsessive and truly chilling, and the second—which features Gunnel Brostrom (remember him, the moronic handyman from **REPTILICUS**?) as an anthropologist who falls in love with a 50,000 year old woman trapped in ice—qualifies as an ambitious disaster. The third story doesn't fulfill the psychosexual

Sharon Tate prepares for her famous bathing scene in *THE FEARLESS VAMPIRE KILLERS* (1967).



promise of the first two offerings, so doesn't click at all. Fittingly preceded by trailers for **NIGHT TIDE**, **FACE OF THE SCREAMING WEREWOLF**, and **TORMENTED**. Worth a look.

[Order Sinister Cinema titles from
PO Box 777, Pacifica CA 94044].

DR. CALIGARI

1989, Shapiro Glickenhau, HF/S, \$89.98

The Goth-bedecked granddaughter of the title character has taken over his asylum and opened it for (monkey) business in this latest bid for the Midnight Movie audience. Intended as the breakthrough film of Stephen Sayadian, better known as "Rinse Dream"—the pseudonymous director of the hardcore sex-fantasies **NIGHTDREAMS** (1981) and **CAFE FLESH** (1982)—it's not bad, but it's not really a movie either. While individual scenes are impeccably and imaginatively designed, the conception behind them never amounts to anything more potent than spoof effect. Imagine if Robert Wiene had made his 1919 classic simply because it was weird-looking! Get this man a writer. Features Jennifer Miro (the Nico-styled vocalist of defunct punk band *The Nuns*) as Miss Coonce.

THE FEARLESS VAMPIRE KILLERS

1967, MGM/UA, HF, \$19.95

Roman Polanski's **DANCE OF THE VAMPIRES**, which parodies Hammer's vampire films (particularly Don Sharp's **KISS OF THE VAMPIRE**), is hilarious despite its serious status as a work of horror and as a work of art. Thankfully, this overdue video release is not the redubbed, rescored, re-edited, 91m abortion which producer Martin Ransohoff long foisted on

American audiences, but rather Polanski's original 107m director's cut. We hope that MGM/UA will issue a letterboxed edition on laserdisc in short order, and that someone will finally get around to releasing Krzysztof Komeda's unforgettable, vertigo-inducing score on CD.

GREMLINS 2, THE NEW BATCH

1990, Warner, HF/S-SS/CC, \$92.95 (VHS/BETA), \$29.98 (8mm)

Joe Dante's sequel to his 1984 mega-hit was the most rib-ticklingly subversive American film of 1990, and represents his best work since **EXPLORERS** (1985). Charlie Haas' screenplay relocates the action from Kingston Falls to the Big Apple, where a new batch of gremlins worms its way through Clamp Tower, computerized highrise throne of business magnate Daniel Clamp (a parody of Donald Trump with a nod to cartoon director Bob Clampett). Only a detailed annotation could

possibly do this—or any of Dante's films—justice, but our favorite parts are Christopher Lee's delicious performance as Dr. Catheter, the gargoyle scene at the "Cathedral of Saint Eva Marie," Phoebe Cates' feelings about Lincoln's Birthday, and Leonard Maltin's cameo as video critic "The Movie Police" (even if the casting here is a bit off). Unfortunately, two of the film's funniest bits (a William Castle-inspired sequence near the middle, the other spoken by Daffy Duck during the end credits) were specifically intended for the theater-going audience, and don't translate as well to the home-viewing experience. Heartily recommended, anyway; this barbed-wire lampoon runs the gamut from goofiness to profundity ("When you build a place for things, things come"), and—no less important—it revives the kind of matinee movie magic we haven't seen since Hammer, AIP, and Ray Harryhausen decided to hang up their hats.



THE GUARDIAN

1989, MCA, HF/S, \$79.95

Pitched to audiences as William Friedkin's first horror film since **THE EXORCIST**, this film has none of the frightening impact or intensity of its immediate predecessor, **RAMPAGE** (1987, a detective thriller about the pursuit of a charismatic, blood-drinking murderer which failed to reach theaters). This adaptation of Dan Greenburg's novel **THE NANNY**—about a too-good-to-be-true governess who sacrifices her infant charges to a monstrous Druid tree—isn't awful, but it tries several times too often to venture beyond lyrical surrealism, always finding ludicrousness waiting in the lurch. After asserting his disbelief in God, how can Friedkin sell belief in a breathing, baby-eating tree? Wardrobe by Denise Cronenberg.

HOUSE OF DARK SHADOWS

1970, MGM/UA, HF, \$19.95

Dan Curtis' feature adaptation of his popular ABC-TV horror soap—despite Jonathan Frid's definitive performance as Barnabas Collins—sticks in the memory as a lot of blue fog, day-glow blood, and tedious walks through endless corridors. It isn't a good horror film by any stretch of the imagination, but it's a good video investment. Why? When this film airs on the TNT Cable Network, this 96m (box reports 98m) feature is subtly sped—not cut—to a condensed running time of 93m. If you don't get TNT, your off-air recording is probably a butchered mess. Its duller (non-vampiric) follow-up, **NIGHT OF DARK SHADOWS** (1972), is also available.

Jenny Seagrove branches out into horror in William Friedkin's THE GUARDIAN (1989).



INDUSTRIAL SYMPHONY NO. 1

1989, Warner, HF/S, \$19.95

David Lynch, Angelo Badalamenti,
Julee Cruise

As a rule, VW doesn't encompass the world of music videos but, though sold as such, this production—written and directed by David Lynch—falls more under the heading of macabre performance art. Presented at the Brooklyn Art Museum Opera House on November 10, 1989, this 50m program begins with the **WILD AT HEART** lovers (Laura Dern and Nicolas Cage) breaking up—an outtake?—then presents the ensuing concert of surrealistic images, Julee Cruise songs, and blitzkriegs as a subterranean examination of the emotions underlying romantic separation. Dern is credited as “Heartbroken Woman,” and Cruise (who sings most of her songs floating in a

prom dress high above the apocalypse decor) is credited as “The Dreamself of the Heartbroken Woman.” Michael L. Anderson, **TWIN PEAKS**’ diminutive “Man from Another Place,” has a prominent role and actually speaks forwards. Composer Angelo Badalamenti’s clarinetist son André appears dressed as the kid in Lynch’s early short **THE GRANDMOTHER**. The tape carries no rating, but includes nudity and violent imagery.

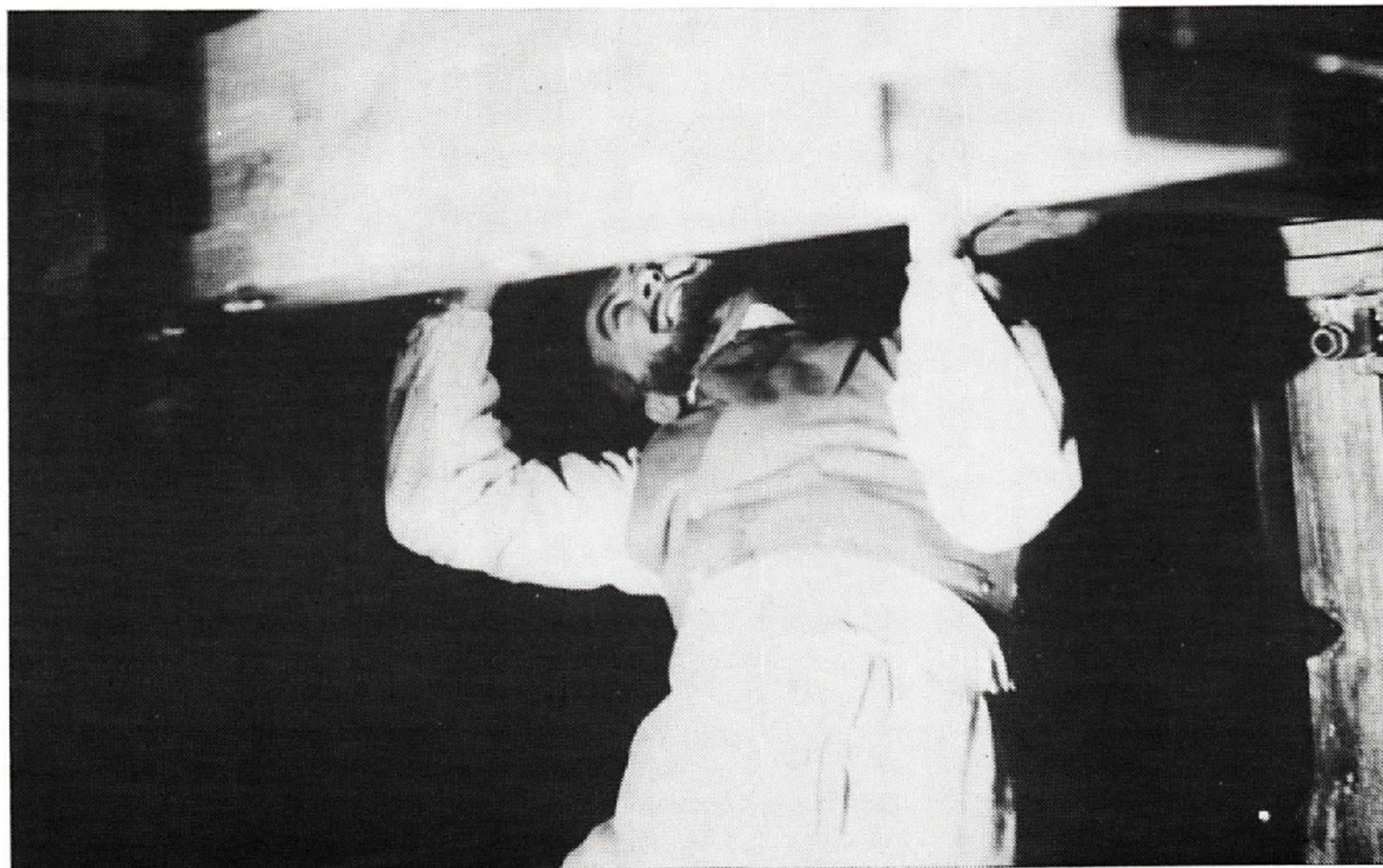
JACK THE RIPPER

1958, Sinister Cinema, \$22.00 ppd.

If you're like us, you've been waiting years for this savage Robert S. Baker/Monty Berman item to resurface—alas, with the exception of a spectacularly lurid finale (complete with color insert), it hasn't dated well. Jimmy Sangster's script shows how much we've learned about this “un-

solved” case since 1958, and the music (a Jimmy McHugh score frequently interrupted by **THRILLER**’s Pete Rugolo) is blaring and tasteless. Like Baker and Berman's next film, the classic **MANIA** aka **THE FLESH AND THE FIENDS** (1959), this title is reportedly available on video in France in an “uncovered” version, containing alternate takes with above-the-waist female nudity in an extended scene of two showgirls entertaining wealthy patrons in a backstage room, and during post-mortems! Sinister's print is beautiful, but seems to be a time-slot edited TV print, running 83m as opposed to the original 88m. That original running time is probably false, because the story seems intact, apart from some missing seconds from the climactic chase. (How did poor Jack get into that elevator shaft anyway?)

The finale of JACK THE RIPPER (1958) may be crushing, but it's no bore.



JOURNEY BENEATH THE DESERT

1958, Sinister Cinema, \$22.00 ppd.

The fact that this is one of Edgar G. Ulmer's few color films — *L'Atlantide* ("The Atlanteans"), aka *Antinea*, *L'Amante della città sepolta* ("Antinea, the Beloved of the Buried City") — will be enough to send many readers scurrying for their checkbooks, but that's not all. Though the cast includes Jean-Louis Trintignant and Gian-Maria Volonté, star billing goes to Haya Harareet — the unblinking starlet who next appeared in *BEN HUR* (1959), which made this earlier film briefly marketable here in 1960. She portrays the latest incarnation of the Queen of Atlantis, playing hostess to a trio of hapless helicopter pilots who stumble upon the fabled lost continent beneath desert sands. The film's final third is a race against the clock to save Atlantis from nuclear testing, and the final image — a man and a woman silhouetted against the sunrise with a towering pylon — summarizes Ulmer's final directorial stage with stark eloquence. Ulmer co-directed with Giuseppe Masini; the excellent special effects were the (uncredited) work of Giovanni Ventimiglia, and Carlo Rustichelli scored. You may recognize Antinea's throne as a prop in the Hades sequence of Bava's *HERCULES IN THE HAUNTED WORLD* (1961)! This American version runs 89m, which is 12m short of its European 101m running time. Includes trailers for *ATOM AGE VAMPIRE* and *BEAST OF HAUNTED CAVE*.



Ulmer imagery: the finale of *JOURNEY BENEATH THE DESERT* (1958).

JOURNEY TO THE LOST CITY

1958-9, Sinister Cinema, \$22.00 ppd.

Fritz Lang's penultimate work, the East Indian *THE TIGER OF ESCHNAPUR* (101m) and *THE INDIAN TOMB* (97m) — two lavish adventure films bridged by a cliffhanger — was his welcome return to the diptych form he pioneered in the '10s and '20s with *SPIDERS* [*Die Spinnen*, 1919] and *DR. MABUSE THE GAMBLER* [*Dr. Mabuse — Der Spieler*, 1922, composed of *Eln Bild der Zeit* ("A Portrait of Today") and *Inferno — Menschen der Zeit* ("Inferno, The People of Today")]. Unfortunately, these films were acquired for the United States by American International Pictures, for whom an uncredited hatchetman dismembered Lang's epic into this single, foolish-seeming, 85m travelogue! With a loss of over two hours, we're left with a blurred but pretty fable about two men (one American, the other an Indian prince) warring over the

love of a beautiful halfcaste dancer. In this version, our hero risks his life for love of a woman he's known for less than 20m! AIP's editing skill can be judged at a glance: Debra Paget's celebrated erotic harem dance — the film's single most acclaimed sequence — is missing! Until some enterprising video label acquires Lang's original versions (which have had 16mm and 35mm engagements in America in recent years, in English too!), this erratic sampler is the only game in town. Preceded by beautiful, letterboxed trailers for *ATLAS*, *GOLIATH AND THE VAMPIRES*, and *GOLIATH AND THE DRAGON*.

SORCERER

1977, MCA, HF/S/CC, \$79.98

William Friedkin's filming of Georges Arnaud's novel *LA SALAIRE DE LA PEUR* — previously made in 1952 by Henri-Georges Clouzot, to whom this film is dedicated — is nerve-whittling long before Roy Scheider and his fellow drivers start escorting their high-

explosive cargo across bumpy jungle terrain; this film is so relentlessly inhospitable to the eyes and nerves it could be the work of a die-hard agoraphobe. It's an extraordinary achievement nevertheless, and a milestone Hollywood film in many ways: it was the last blockbuster release to be financed (to the tune of \$22,000,000) and distributed by two major studios (Universal and Paramount), which has accounted for its unavailability on video till now; it was the first American feature to use a score by the German synthesizer musicians *Tangerine Dream*; and also the first film to sport what might be termed a "tactile" title à la **BLADE RUNNER** (apart from being apologetically painted on Bruno Cremer's Pazuzu-faced truck, the title doesn't really belong). No supernatural content, but fantastical in the sense that it makes

our planet appear abrasively alien, particularly in its wonderfully delirious moonscape climax. Unfortunately, the cassette does not include the mood-setting musical overture reel included in the theatrical release, and the cropping of its original Panavision framing to 1.33:1 makes the film's visual harshness all the more grating.

SPIDERS

(*Die Spinnen*, 1919)

Kino International, HF, \$29.95

The third film directed by Fritz Lang—still rivetingly modern in its pace and technique—is composed of two feature-length parts, "**The Golden Sea**" and "**The Diamond Ship**", which respectively follow the adventurer Kay Hoog and his criminal adversaries, the Spiders, to recover a fabled Incan treasure, and a diamond bearing

the likeness of a Buddha. This diptych contains, with the earlier French works of Louis Feuillade, the seeds of the adventure serial later popularized in America and, as such, is owed everything by the Indiana Jones films and, indeed, any heroic film series of our sequel-saddled culture. Part II was photographed by Karl Freund (uncredited, the tape mentions only Part I's cameraman, Carl Schumann) and is of particular historic interest as the project which prevented Lang from directing **THE CABINET OF DR. CALIGARI** [*Das Cabinet des Dr. Calligari*, 1919]. Once believed to be a lost film, this reconstructed (but still-incomplete) 137m copy was restored by David and Kimberly Sheperd in 1979, following Lang's own original color-tinting plans. Organ score by Gaylord Carter. Also available on laserdisc for \$59.98.

Watch out for that bridge, it's a Pazuzu! —from SORCERER (1977).





A scene from *TWIN FREAKS?* Close—it's our old buddy Belial from *BASKET CASE 2* (1989).

Laserdiscs

BASKET CASE 2

1989, South Gate, \$39.98

Frank Henenlotter's long-awaited sequel to his 1982 debut is something of a disappointment. Kevin VanHentryck returns as Duane, half of the separated Bradley Siamese twins, whose subhuman sibling Belial painted the Bowery red in the earlier installment. Here, the twins withdraw to a retreat for misfits in upstate New York, where the strange company tempts the "normal" Duane to exert his fraternal independence. The climax is not only predictable, but a couple of the things which this film's whimsically wormy perspective leads us to expect—like the woman doctor's obvious wig maybe coming off to reveal a second human face on her scalp, for instance—never pan out. Moon-face, one of the film's many charmingly designed freaks, is played by an unrecognizable

David Emge ("Flyboy" in *DAWN OF THE DEAD*, 1979), which may be the biggest shock of the whole production.

THE BAT WHISPERS

1930, PK, \$39.98

Roland West's sound remake of his silent classic *THE BAT* (1925; like this film, also recently restored by the UCLA Film Archives) improves upon its predecessor in almost every way. Again, the story focuses on the house of a renowned mystery writer whose mansion—and its unusual number of visitors—is under threat by the title character, a murderous masked criminal. Like Paul Leni's *THE CAT AND THE CANARY* (1927), this is an ideal haunted house spooker, and it unreels with dazzling modernity and technical innovation. Of course, it's especially interesting to assess its overwhelming influence (which is still putting it mildly) on Bob Kane's conception of Batman; Tim Burton's 1988 blockbuster paid homage to a handful of the daz-

zling miniature effects shots achieved here by West's crew. This film was shot simultaneously in two versions (one in 35mm, the other in a widescreen 65mm format); it isn't known as of this writing whether this laserdisc release will contain only the former or both versions, but let's cross our fingers. Still not available on videocassette.

THE DARK CRYSTAL

1983, HBO, \$59.98

A Limited Edition letterboxed pressing of one of the most underrated fantasies of the past decade, and possibly the best of all testaments to the creative reach of its directors, Jim Henson and Frank Oz. Aside from the unfortunate fumble of its hero and heroine, who as the most human characters are also unfortunately the most tellingly puppet-like, this film delivers an astonishingly rich and believable tapestry of invented myths and species. This widescreen edition invites enjoyment on a level beyond its animatronics,

Publicity art for
THE OUTER LIMITS' debut
 episode "The Galaxy Being"
 (1963).

permitting a broader appreciation of its staging and art direction, where the splendors are panoramic and equally detailed. A most welcome disc.

THE DAY OF THE TRIFFIDS

1963, \$49.95

Steve Sekely's semi-successful filming of John Wyndham's classic novel—documenting the after-effects of a meteor shower which blinds most of civilization and mutates plants into carnivorous horrors called "triffids"—has been a public domain video eyesore for years. This laserdisc release changes all that by presenting the film for the first time in its original widescreen format.

THE GIRL IN A SWING

1989, HBO, \$39.95

Don't miss this one, a spell-binding romance that swoons into a delirious, erotic ghost story—and the last thing anyone might have expected from director Gordon Hessler (**SCREAM AND SCREAM AGAIN, THE MURDERS IN THE RUE MORGUE**) at this stage of his believed-moribund career. This laserdisc pressing restores some fleeting seconds of simulated sex that got the film initially slapped with an X rating. The film is available on cassette only in its R-rated (119m) version, the impact of which hardly seems compromised.



THE OUTER LIMITS

1963-65, MGM/UA, \$89.95

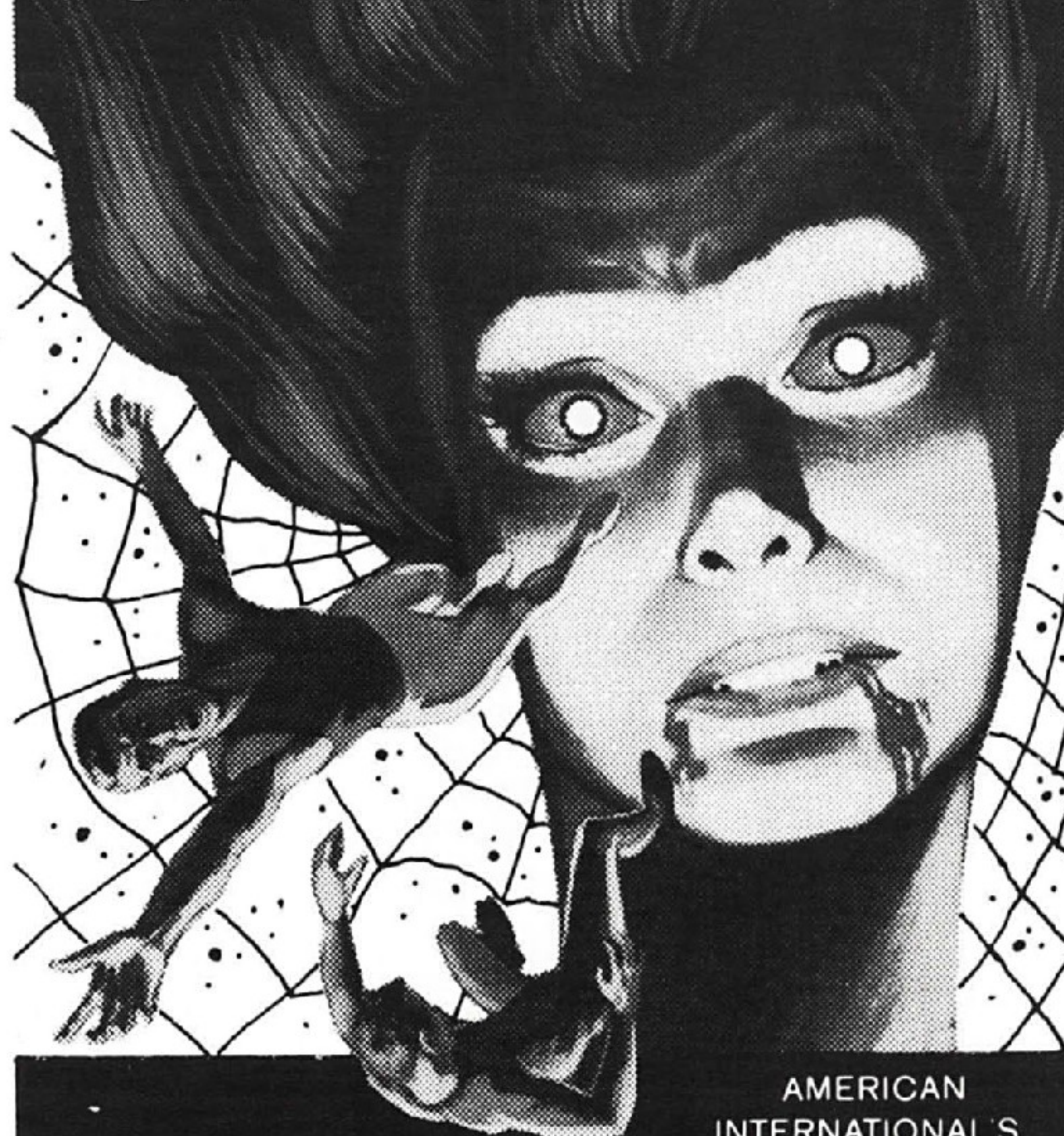
A four-disc gift set preserving eight episodes of the peerless ABC-TV series with state-of-the-art video fidelity. While half of the episodes selected by MGM for inclusion here are inarguable ("The Galaxy Being", "The Architects of Fear", "Demon with a Glass Hand" and "Soldier"), others show acute misjudgment ("Fun and Games" and "The Mutant"), and two other minor titles ("Cold Hands, Warm Heart" and "The Chameleon") have not been previously released on cassette. With choices like these, let's hope this isn't a one-shot.

PSYCH-OUT WILD IN THE STREETS

1967/1968, HBO, \$59.95

A two-disc double-billing of AIP's weirdest wends into the Youth Explosion of the late '60s. The first movie is Richard (THE STUNT MAN) Rush's document of San Francisco's Haight-Ashbury scene, as seen through the eyes of a traumatized deaf girl (Susan Strasberg) in search of her lost brother. Jack Nicholson stars as Stoney, the guitarist (bad acting on that fretboard, Jack!) of a local rock band and guru of a group of particularly manipulative and self-serving acid-heads. Noteworthy trivia: the flashback explaining

**HIDEOUS
BEYOND BELIEF...
with an INHUMAN
CRAVING!**



AMERICAN
INTERNATIONAL'S

QUEEN OF BLOOD

IN PATHÉCOLOR

STARRING JOHN BASIL JUDI
SAXON • RATHBONE • MEREDITH

CO-STARRING DENNIS HOPPER • Written and Directed by CURTIS HARRINGTON • Produced by GEORGE EDWARDS

Strasberg's trauma was purloined from James Purdy's shattering short story "Why Can't They Tell You Why?" (from his collection *COLOR OF DARKNESS*), and her climactic STP trip features the Sound FX used earlier by AIP for the Medusa in *THE MEDUSA AGAINST THE SON OF HERCULES!* The second feature is screenwriter Robert Thom's dark, incisive satire of the media's infatuation with '60s youth culture, in which a hip-hyped rock star (Christopher Jones—whatever happened to *him*?) is elected President, lowers the voting age to 14, and sends everyone over 30 to LSD "contemplation" camps. It was Richard Pryor's film debut, and eagle-eyed viewers can spot cameos by Dick Clark, (then-future) teen idol Bobby Sherman, and Barry Williams ("Greg Brady" of TV's *THE BRADY BUNCH*). Look for the prop Bob Dylan poster that appears in both movies!

QUEEN OF BLOOD/ PLANET OF THE VAMPIRES

1966/1965, HBO, \$59.95

AIP's best science fiction films of the 1960's are packaged together in this irresistible two-disc double feature. The former, directed by Curtis Harrington, has not been previously released on cassette; it's an eerie excursion into futuristic expressionism, meagerly produced but benefiting tremendously from Russian stock footage (*Nlebo Zowlet*, "The Sky Beckons," 1959) and the sleek green menace of Florence Marley as vampiric royalty from space. Among the cast members are Dennis Hopper, John Saxon, and Forrest Ackerman. Its co-feature is Mario Bava's *Terrore nello spazio*, now fabled as the cinematic basis of Ridley Scott's *ALIEN* (1979), and the Maestro's most phantas-

magorical demonstration of his ability to conjure entire worlds—in this case, the most convincing alien environment ever filmed—out of next to nothing. This is HBO's rescored version of the film, but here Kendall Schmidt's synthesized interference actually enriches the film by ousting its original library score with an accompaniment specifically written in support of its mesmeric images. Ah, if only HBO would discover the benefits of letterboxing!

THE THING

1982, MCA, \$35.98

This is a newly remastered pressing of John Carpenter's already-classic film of John W. Campbell's story "Who Goes There?"—letterboxed for the first time on disc, restoring its original Panavision widescreen ratio. Stereo sound (not included on the earliest MCA cassette release) and the film's original theatrical trailer are thrown in for good measure.

Canada

L'INFER DU PLAISIR

("The Pain of Pleasure")
CIC Video

At 81m, this French-language version of Jess Franco's *Sadomania* is longer than the English version circulating in Canada and the States under the title *HELL-HOLE WOMEN*, but still not the complete 89m picture.

LAST HOUSE ON THE LEFT

CIC Video

The rumors are almost true: this is a virtually intact (84m) version of Wes Craven's first feature, including all of the footage miss-

ing from the American release on Vestron, as described in the "Video Watchdog" column of *GOREZONE* #11. There are no end credits, however.

MAD FOXES

CIC Video

A strange German softcore film with uncharacteristically violent overtones, directed by "Paul Gray" (Paolo Grau) for Erwin C. Dietrich's Ascot Films. The Ontario version of this video runs 73m, eliminating several disturbing scenes of brutality, rape and castration; a 79m edition is available for non-Ontario markets, longer but still containing a couple of very brief edits. With Eric Falk.

MAN BEHIND THE SUN

Jade-Can Video

Sadistic film documenting the atrocities committed against Chinese prisoners of war in Japanese medical experiment camps during WWII. By all reports, it's this year's *Nekromantik*—little more than a video endurance test. Directed by Xeng Lu Law in Mandarin Chinese, with English and Cantonese subtitles. 103m (count 'em as they crawl by).

PRISON DES FEMMES

("Women's Prison")
Must Video

Another Jess Franco women's prison opus, released elsewhere under the titles *WOMEN BEHIND BARS* (UK), *Visa pour Mourir* (France), and *Un Secondina in un Carcere Femminile* (Italy). This French-language video version features the (sometimes missing) pre-credit sequence involving the masked criminals, and the direction is credited—as on British prints—to Rick Deconinck, an actor who appears in the film under the alias "Bigottini."

France

AFTER HALLOWEEN

For Jamie Lee Curtis, this re-titled release of Roger Spottiswode's *TERROR TRAIN* (1980) is at least *chronologically* correct. However, French *chiens du garde vidéo* expected to find it under its theatrical title *Le Monstre du Train* ("The Train Monster").

AFTER HOLOCAUST

You want disorientation? See this retitled copy of Ishiro Honda's *THE TERROR OF GODZILLA* [*Mekagojira No Gyakushu*, 1975]—a Toho monster stomp dubbed into French! It was first shown in France as *Les Monstres du Continent Perdu* ("Monsters from the Unknown Planet").

L'ARMÉE SAUVAGE

("The Savage Army")

This is Robert Gordon's seldom-seen *BLACK ZOO*, a Herman Cohen production from 1963. Better known in France as *Fauves Meurtriers* ("Deadly Beasts"), it features a typically overwrought Michael Gough performance as the actor presides over a cult of animal worshippers. This dog isn't worthy of worship in any language! With Elisha Cook, Jr.

ASSASSINATS DANS LA HAUTE COUTURE

("Murders in the Fashion Industry")
Columbus Video

After being shown on French television's M6 channel, Mario Bava's classic *Sel Donne per l'Assassino* ("Six Women for the Murderer," 1964) has appeared

on unauthorized videocassettes under this title, as well as its better-known American sobriquet, **BLOOD AND BLACK LACE**.

DEATH DREAMS

Gemini Video

Buzzing behind this misleading title is Kurt Neumann's **THE FLY** (1958), which was originally issued in France as **La Mouche Noire** ("The Black Fly"). This version is in English with French subtitles—most unusual.

LA MALÉDICTION DES MORTS-VIVANTS

("Curse of the Living Dead")

America Video

John Gilling's acclaimed Hammer classic **PLAGUE OF THE ZOMBIES** is available almost nowhere on video, but it lurks on French shelves under this title (previously used for an American re-release of Bava's **KILL BABY KILL!** [*Operazione Paura*]). This film was released theatrically in France as **L'Invasion des Morts-Vivants** ("Invasion of the Living Dead"). Like its mistitled label-mate **Dracula le Maudit**, this version is 4m short of the full 90m running time.

OPERATION DESTRUCTOR

This **RAMBO**esque title was coughed-up to conceal the identity of Irwin Allen's **THE LOST WORLD** (1960), theatrically exhibited in France under the precise translation **Le Monde Perdu**. Now people who want to avoid this silly movie can buy it by accident! At least it's letterboxed.

REVENGE IN THE HOUSE OF USHER

American Video/Fil à Film

Like the American release ver-

sion of this film on Wizard Video, this is Eurociné's re-edited version of Jess Franco's Spanish expressionist **El Huidmento de la Casa Usher** (1983). This film—a desecration bearing no resemblance to Franco's original intentions—has also been shown theatrically in France as **Neuros** ("Neurosis"). It is padded with exactly 14m of **THE AWFUL DR. ORLOFF** [*Gritos en la Noche*, 1962] and the box sports a standard 90m running time.

Italy

For this issue only, our Italian listings will focus on recent video releases of films by Jess Franco, not covered by our Selective Videography in VW #1. Unless otherwise specified, the following titles are on the GB Video/Avofilm label.

ALLARME A SCOTLAND YARD: SEI OMICIDI SENZA ASSASSINO

("Calling Scotland Yard: Six Murders and No Killer")

A retitling of Jess Franco's **DEATH PACKS A SUITCASE** [*Der Todesracher von Soho*, "The Death's Head of Soho," 1970], an adaptation of a novel by Bryan Edgar Wallace starring Horst Tappert.

CONFESSIONI PROIBITE DI UNA MONACA ADOLESCENTE

("Forbidden Confessions of a Teenage Nun")

This is a thinly-veiled retitling of Franco's **LOVE LETTERS OF A PORTUGUESE NUN** [*Die Liebesbriefe einer portugiesischen Nonne*, 1976], one of his best films.

LA FELICITA NEL PECCATO

("The Happiness in Sin")

Franco's hardcore psychological drama **Les Nuits Brulantes de Linda** ("The Brutal Nights of Linda," 1973), in which a nymphomaniacal Lina Romay engages in a good deal of hole-and-soul-searching to recall the source of her dark obsessions. More horrific than erotic. Reportedly a very hard title to find in Italy, it is available on video in France under its original title.

FRENESIE EROTISCHE DI UNA NINFOMANE

("Erotic Frenzy of a Nymphomaniac")

Franco's **SEXY SISTERS** [*Die Teufelschen Schwestern*, "Satanic Sisters," 1977], available in the States on the Private Screenings/Luna Video label.

PORNO SHOCK

This is a retitling of Franco's **Ruf der Blonden Göttin** ("Cry of a Blonde Goddess," 1977), in which Vicky Adams stars as an American woman vacationing in the Caribbean, who is abducted by a voodoo sect which introduces her to (deranged) sexual satisfaction. Italian theatrical title: **I Placeri Erotici di una Signora Bene** ("The Erotic Pleasures of a Beautiful Woman").

SICARIOS

("Cut-throats")

The police wrongfully arrest a doctor for the murder of a woman found dead and disfigured, but the suspect manages to investigate the case himself. Judging from the cast list, this is most likely a retitling of Franco's seldom-seen **Le Chemin Solitaire** ("The Lonely Path," 1973), starring Lina

Venezuela

Romay, Jack Taylor, Paul Muller and Alice Arno.

SINFONIA EROTICA

("Erotic Symphony")

Panarecord

A 1978 Franco film starring "Candice Coster" (Lina Romay), Albino Graciani, and Susan Hemingway. Never widely distributed.

SINFONIA PER UN SADICO

("Symphony for a Sadist")

Although packaged as being a 1966 release, set in Germany, and starring Hugh White, this is actually Franco's **THE HAND OF A DEAD MAN** [*Le Sadique Baron von Klaus*, "The Sadistic Baron von Klaus," 1963], a French/Spanish co-production starring Howard Vernon and Hugo Blanco. It was released theatrically in Italy as *La Bestia del Castello Maladetta* ("The Beast of the Accursed Castle").

UNA SPIA SULLA CITTÀ

("A Spy Over the City")

A retitling of one of the earliest Franco films yet to surface on video, *Rififi en la Ciudad* ("Rififi in the City," 1963), a B&W espionage thriller starring Jean Servais, Laura Granados, and Fernando Gomez.

VIZIO IN BOCCA

("The Vice Inside the Mouth")

Another Franco film, starring "Lina Norman" (Lina Romay), Alice Arno and Monica Stevens, reportedly on the subject of Hong Kong prostitution rackets and gang wars. Unidentifiable.

EL ANTI-CRISTO

("The AntiChrist")

This is the Venezuelan version of Embassy Home Video's **THE TEMPTER** (1974), directed by Alberto de Martino. With a running time of 114m, a full 20m of dialogue and exorcism sequences can be found in *El Anti-Cristo* that are missing from **THE TEMPTER**.

BLACULA

Believe it or not, this is a retitling of José Luis Merino's *La Orgia de los Muertos* ("The Orgy of the Dead," 1972), an effective little opus featuring Paul Naschy in a cameo role as a hunchbacked necrophile. In the States this film can be found under several nowhere-near titles (**RETURN OF THE ZOMBIES**,



THE HANGING WOMAN and **BEYOND THE LIVING DEAD**) with annoyingly inconsistent running times (87m to 91m). This Venezuelan version contains the film in its full uncut (97m) glory. A few extra gore sequences count for part of this, but most of the missing minutes fill-in a character (a priest) edited out of the US versions completely!

EL BUQUE MALDITO

("The Cursed Ship")

The third feature of Amando de Ossorio's celebrated Blind Dead quartet, available in the States on Super Video and Vid America/World's Worst Video's **HORROR OF THE ZOMBIES** (1972). The actual title on the film print is **THE GHOST GALLEON**. It runs 90m, which is about 5m longer than the US version which is missing some gore and nudity in the central graphic horror sequence.

COMER DE VIVO

("Eaten Alive")

A Venezuelan version of Continental Video's **THE EMERALD JUNGLE** (1980). This Umberto Lenzi cannibal film is slightly expanded here by 2m; this encompasses only additional expository footage with Robert Kerman and does NOT (contrary to popular rumor) display any surplus entrail-pulling. The complete running time is 93m.

EL DESCUARTIZADOR DE NUEVA YORK

("The New York Avenger")

This is Lucio Fulci's **Lo Squartatore di New York** (1982), released here as **THE NEW YORK RIPPER** by Vidmark. The Vidmark release runs 88m while this Venezuelan counterpart is 2m longer. The extra footage involves

toe copulation and takes place at a strip joint halfway through the film.

LA LOBA

("The She Wolf")

Just what the *mondo demanda*: another version of Rino di Silvestro's **La Lupa Mannera** ("Werewolf Woman," 1976), a preposterous, Spanish sex/gore outing that should not be confused with Rafael Baledon's film of the same name (**La Loba**, 1964, a Mexican film which treated the same theme less explicitly but with somewhat more success). Silvestro's film has achieved eye-sore status in the US on several different PD video labels under titles like **LEGEND OF THE WOLFWOMAN** (VCI) and **SHE WOLF**. On the plus side, the Venezuelan tape is more complete by 15m (100m vs. 85m) in the boobs and blood departments, and it's a much nicer-looking print. US versions tend to look like they sat outside in the weather for a few years.

LA MONACHE DI SANT'ARCHANGELO

("The Monastery of Saint Michael")

Available in America from MPI Home Video as **SISTERS OF SATAN** (not the film released under the same title by Academy, which is a retitled **Alucarda** by J.L. Moctezuma). Commonly regarded as the best of the nuns-and-inquisition pictures popularized by the **MARK OF THE DEVIL** films, it stars Anne Heywood and Luc Merenda, and was directed by peplum specialist Domenico Paolella under the transparent pseudonym "Paolo Domenica," thus preserving his status as a *buon Cattolica*. The US version runs 90m, but **La Monache** (which contains the film's original Italian credits but is dubbed in

English) features an extra 7m of orgasms, spasms, and iconoclasm.

LA MONTAÑA DEL DIOS CANIBAL

("Mountain of the Cannibal God")

This version of Sergio Martino's **La Montagna del Dio Cannibale** (1978) runs 98m—15m longer than its American counterpart, Wizard's out-of-print **SLAVE OF THE CANNIBAL GOD**. The new footage serves up even more graphic disembowelments and castration horrors for the edification of stunned onlookers Stacy Keach and Ursula Andress.

EL PAIS DEL SEXO SALVAJE

("A Nation of Sex Savages")

AKA Umberto Lenzi's first foray into jungle cuisine, **Mondo Cannibale** (1972). You've heard for years that Prism's domestic release (**THE MAN FROM DEEP RIVER**) is missing a rather nasty cannibalism sequence?—well, here it is. An extra minute, if you can take it.

EL SADICO DE NOTRE DAME

("The Sadist of Notre Dame")

For those disappointed by **DEMONIAC**—Wizard Video's scant 79m release of this Jess Franco film—this expanded version is indeed a salt for sore eyes. An additional 8m provides the viewer with a much better appreciation for the film and particularly Franco's lead performance as Vogel, the fanatical Catholic murderer. Several stunning, violence-laden sex scenes (completely missing from **DEMONIAC**) greatly intensify its stifling and perverse atmosphere.



The Cutting Room Floor



ALIENS: SPECIAL EDITION

*No Queen
Mother
for the
Queen
Mother?*

Forthcoming on CBS/Fox Laserdisc, \$99.98

Previewed by Mark Kermode



EARLIER THIS YEAR, BRITISH Watchdogs should have been the first to set eyes on the complete cut of James Cameron's modern science fiction classic, **ALIENS** (1986). Scheduled for sell-through release on April 12, 1990, **ALIENS: SPECIAL EDITION** contained 17m of footage excised from the theatrical release, replaced by director James Cameron specifically for home video and cable television markets. Although a partially reinstated print aired in 1989 on America's CBS network, the "Special Edition" was considered by Cameron to be the definitive cut of his movie. Packaged using an original poster design for **ALIENS** depicting the Queen Mother alien, **ALIENS: SE** was planned for a limited three-month release

period, after which CBS/Fox intended to withdraw the title from circulation. Available only in a 1.33:1 pan-and-scanned format, the British release would prefigure a letterboxed release on CBS/Fox laserdisc for American release — along with a similarly deluxe laser edition of Ridley Scott's **ALIEN** (1977) — tentatively scheduled for before year's end.

Two weeks before its intended release, however, the eagerly awaited **ALIENS: SE** video was cancelled, due to a top level management decision in America.¹ Despite a huge and successful preliminary marketing campaign, with projected sales of 50-60,000 units, CBS/Fox were forced to kill **ALIENS: SE** causing a heated and hostile reaction from devoted British fans. There is no indication that it will surface in Britain in the foreseeable future.

The reinstated material consists mainly of character development footage, introducing a previously absent subplot concerning the earthbound daughter of Ripley (Sigourney Weaver), which foreshadows and strengthens her subsequent relationship with the orphaned Newt (Carrie Henn). The significant additions are:

- Following her rescue from deep space, Ripley dreams in the hospital of an alien erupting from her chest. Awakening in fright, she cuddles Jones the cat, murmuring "It's all right, it's over." **ALIENS: SE** here inserts a sequence of 2m 2s, which begins with Ripley seated on a park bench amidst leafy surroundings, apparently on earth. The

*Sigourney Weaver
and Carrie Henn
scramble some eggs
in the fiery conclusion
of ALIENS.*



camera pans back to reveal that she is in fact merely gazing at a large HDTV screen projecting environmental footage in a steely room. She is joined by Carter Burke (Paul Reiser), who comments on her deposition and briefly coaches her on how to handle herself during her forthcoming trial. Ripley asks if he's had any news of her daughter, and Burke produces a file on Amanda Ripley McClarent, aged 66 at the time of her death two years ago. Ripley stares balefully at a photograph of an elderly woman as Burke rattles off the details of her cremation and lack of offspring. "I promised her I'd be home for her birthday," Ripley manages. "Her *eleventh* birthday..."

The "Special Edition" cuts from this addition to Ripley's trial by the company, which is itself expanded by 54s, comprising the following summation, immediately following Ripley's final, exasperated outburst:

- Van Leuwen announces the Board's finding that Ripley acted with questionable judgment and is unfit to hold an ICC license as a commercial flight officer, suspending her license indefinitely. He further states that no criminal charges will be filed, and that she is to be released on her own recognizance for six months of "psychometric probation." The proceedings are closed.

Cutting back to the aftermath of the hearing, **ALIENS: SE** next adds its boldest contribution: a sequence of 5m 41s depicting life on LV 426 *before* the devastation. This material (the only recovered footage not included in the expanded CBS broadcast) introduces a number of new characters, revitalizing the conspiratorial theme introduced in Scott's **ALIEN**, and detailing the exact nature of the aliens' attack. In both versions of **ALIENS**, the inquest scene ends with Van Leuwen informing Ripley that planet LV 426 has been inhabited for 20 years by colonists without incident, including 50 or 60 families. Alarmed and equally mystified, Ripley echoes, "Families..?" **ALIENS: SE** now cuts thusly:

- The camera pans across a desolate, windy landscape, passing a sign which reads "HADLEY'S HOPE, Pop 158" and moving on toward the colony. A large transporter vehicle enters the camp. Inside the control center, there is thriving activity. Focus on two colonists working for the Weyland Yutani Corpo-

ration, identified as Al and Lyedecker. Lyedecker is in communication with some "wildcatters" on a surveyance trip beyond the alien range, and he passes on to Al the message that they're "onto something" and want to know whether they have a claim on any discovery they might make. Not wishing to get bogged down in company claims paperwork, Al offers, "As far as I'm concerned, if he finds something, then it's his." Then Lyedecker finds a group of children playing in this "restricted" area and orders them out.

Cut to planet exterior. A large vehicle travels out into no-man's land. Inside the vehicle are Newt (the first time we see her), her brother Timmy, her mother Annie, and her father (who is never identified). Timmy and Newt are squabbling:

TIMMY: You go in places we can't fit!

NEWT: So? That's why I'm the best!

ANNIE: Knock it off! If I catch either of you playing in the air ducts again, I'll tan your hides!

At this point, the squabble ends as the family is struck dumb by the sighting of the derelict spacecraft first uncovered in **ALIEN**. Knowing this to be a major discovery, Annie suggests to her husband that they call in a report, but he vetoes this "till we know what to call it in as." The parents instruct their children to stay inside the vehicle and enter the alien ship through a gash in its hull.

Dissolves suggest the passing of time. Inside the transporter, Timmy has fallen asleep. Newt nudges him, saying that they've been gone a long time. After a few seconds of suspenseful calm, the transporter door rips open and Annie grabs the handset, screaming "Mayday Mayday!" Newt screams as she sees her father lying outside with an alien facehugger attached to his head, its spiny tail tightening around his neck.

Then **ALIENS: SE** cuts from Newt's anguished cry to the silent, insular surroundings of a futuristic domestic quarters, where Ripley pensively smokes a cigarette.

No significant additions now appear until after the troopers' arrival on LV 426, from which a now bedraggled Newt is found hiding in the very air vents



Newt's father meets the facehugger in this restored scene from ALIENS: SPECIAL EDITION.

her mother warned her against. The next major addition is a 29s expansion of Ripley's bedtime conversation with Newt which, in the "Special Edition," broaches the subject of Ripley's lost daughter Amy, establishing Newt as a surrogate child. Amy was the same age as Newt when last seen by Ripley, a coincidence which lends resonance to her promise that she won't abandon Newt.

● **ALIENS: SE** inserts the following exchange, immediately after the child's inquiry about the reality of monsters:

NEWT: Did one of those things grow inside [Mommy]?

RIPLEY: I don't know, Newt. That's the truth.

NEWT: Isn't that where babies come from? I mean, people babies? They grow inside you.

RIPLEY: It's very different.

NEWT: Did you ever have a baby?

RIPLEY: Yes, I did. I had a little girl.

NEWT: Where is she?

RIPLEY: She's gone.

NEWT: You mean dead.

As this dialogue shows, the similarities between the alien impregnation and human pregnancy and birth are touched on explicitly. This parallel has been considered significant by many commentators who have attempted to analyze the subtexts of **ALIENS** as a gynophobic tract. This crucial insert ends as we cut back to Ripley giving Newt the tracker watch which will ensure that she can find her anywhere in the camp.

A final, brief but significant addition is made in Ripley's parting exchange with the wounded Hicks (Michael Biehn) immediately before returning to the erupting colony in search of Newt.

● **ALIENS: SE** adds the following dialogue to emphasize the dawning relationship between Ripley and Hicks, suggesting the formation under pressure of a nuclear family in embryo.

RIPLEY: See you, Hicks.

HICKS: It's "Duane."

RIPLEY: (pause) Ellen.

HICKS: Don't be gone long, Ellen.²

- Other new scenes presented in **ALIENS: SE** deal with the setting-up and use of automatic "sentry" weapons, mentioned only in passing in the standard release. The first addition is a 40s sequence in which Vasquez and Hudson mount and prime two "sentries" in a corridor and test their effectiveness by throwing a metal canister in front of the guns — prompting an instant (and decidedly discouraging) rain of bullets.

- The sentries subsequently provide the basis of a relatively inconsequential action sequence, in which Hudson and Vasquez successfully repel the approaching aliens but exhaust their ammunition supply in the process. Consisting simply of cuts between the firing guns and reaction shots inside the control room, as Ripley and Hicks and Hudson and Vasquez watch their retaliation sources dwindle, the scene is essentially an exercise in textbook tension.

Rumors meanwhile abound of two scenes still missing from the extended **ALIENS**: a scene in which the alien spaceship is shown engulfed in a lava flow, and another in which Ripley finds Burke cocooned by the aliens, but refuses to free him. Hard evidence of the existence of such scenes is elusive.

Talking to British journalist Nigel Floyd (with whose kind permission the following extract is reproduced) in February 1990 — immediately before the planned release of **ALIENS: SE** — director James Cameron made the following points:

"The 'Special Edition' represents exactly what **ALIENS** would have been, had there not been the constraints of the exhibitors requiring a shorter film. The most important addition, in one sense, is the subplot about Ripley's daughter, of whom we are unaware in the [theatrical version]. When we had to shorten the film for mass consumption, and get it within the parameters suitable for US exhibitors, I was always kind of ambivalent about that subplot; on the one hand, it does add dimension and depth but, on the other hand, it does make it kind of convenient, almost a ricochet romance. I was always a little wary of it.

"In the extended version, you also see the colony in operation before the devastation, so the audience has fixed in its mind a sense of contrast when the troopers enter later, which was something audiences didn't get to experience in the theatrical release. The colony was being introduced to them visually at a time when it was already wrecked, so one had to fill-in what it must have been like previ-

ously in their minds.

"When it came to cutting material, I had to muster all the negative arguments and obviously, in this case, the point is that it breaks one's subjective narrative focus, to go to a Third Person POV on a distant planet, and then come back 10m later to the film's main character. Breaking that focus is never good. I tried as much as possible to avoid that from then on, even when the troopers are going into the Terraforming station, and Ripley is basically on the sidelines, connected to them by video. She's experiencing what they're experiencing, and I'm constantly cutting back to her reactions; it's almost as if she's looking over their shoulders.

"I solved the problem there, but I had no way of doing so earlier in the film. I just felt, in writing the script, that I needed to give the audience that information — [to see] the colony alive and bustling, its families hard at work. When we return there later, it's just empty, echoing corridors, and there's a sense of shocking contrast."

Cameron will speak at greater length about the making of **ALIENS** on Side Four of CBS/Fox's announced two-disc **ALIENS: SE** package, in nearly an hour's worth of previously unseen interview footage. The interview — conducted by CINEFEX editor Don Shay and previously excerpted for his "How They Do It" segment on Cinemax's **THE MOVIE SHOW** — turned out so well that Shay was invited by CBS/Fox to prepare a matching interview with Ridley Scott for inclusion in their **ALIEN** companion volume. This two-disc letterboxed set will reportedly unveil for the first time the film's hideously grim "incubation chamber" outtakes, (which ironically contradict the role of the Queen Mother's reproductive cycle as outlined in **ALIENS**) and several newly discovered and unexpected rarities besides.

No videocassette release of either special edition is planned, though CBS/Fox claims a company policy of releasing nothing on laserdisc that isn't already available on tape!

¹ According to a contact at CBS/Fox Home Video, the decision came from 20th Century Fox itself, which is only partially affiliated with its video arm.

² It is worth noting that, in a recent story-draft for the current production of **ALIENS III**, the family of Ripley, Hicks, and Newt does not endure, as Hicks dies in transit. A reliable insider source also reports that Newt does feature in the new sequel, but finally falls afoul of the aliens' grasp.



Looking With Averted Eyes

The Terror of **PUPI AVATI**

VW Directrospective
By Tim Lucas



BORN GIUSEPPE AVATI on November 3, 1938 in Bologna, Italy, "Pupi" Avati spent the first eight years of his life in the Emilia-Romagna countryside. Isolated there by the war and lack of media, he was attracted to those things outside the norm of everyday reality, particularly the physical deformities of neighboring peasants and the mysteries of the Church. His family relocated to Rome in the late 1940s, where Avati divided his young adulthood between stints as a jazz musician and investigative journalist. These early vocations continue to express themselves in his horror and fantasy films — which occupy a small corner of a broader filmography moving ever closer to the mainstream of Italian cinema — as his scenarios (many co-authored by his brother Antonio) have either musical, improvisational tendencies, or a compelling basis in the processes of investigation. Avati claims that each of his fantastic films have been derived from instances of reported fact.

Despite the more famous achievements of Dario Argento, it is Avati who has done the most to keep his country's traditional fantastic cinema alive and undistorted, proving that an ounce of imagination is worth more to a capable filmmaker than all the snorkels and Luma cranes money can buy. While Argento uses the stylistic experimentation permissible within the *giallo* to cre-

ate some of horror's loudest and most color-sweetened confections, Avati's universe is more earth-hued and elemental, perpetuating the examples set by Riccardo Freda, Camillo Mastrocinque and the Mario Bava of **KILL, BABY, KILL** [*Operazione paura*, 1966].

As fortune would have it, Avati's directorial career began in the acknowledged last year of the Italian Golden Age of Terror (1956-1966) with **Balsamus, L'Uomo di Satana** ["Balsamus, the Devil's Man"], the story of a faith-healing dwarf, played by the uncanny Bob Tonelli (an Avati regular). Though Balsamus is a fake, he comes to believe in his own powers after inexplicably restoring his dead mother-in-law to life. In a climactic episode, Balsamus' wife demands that he fulfill his conjugal duties,

Luigi Costa, the screen's most chilling zombie, in REVENGE OF THE DEAD [Zeder, 1983].





Gabriele Lavia drags wife Anne Canovas to the nearest K-Zone in REVENGE OF THE DEAD.

revealing the healer's inability to overcome his own sexual impotence. Balsamus perceives this failure as a signal of the loss of his magical powers, and drinks poison. The film—never screened in English—is said to be technically uneven, but the synopsis shows it is thematically allied with Avati's later work on a surprisingly mature level.

Avati's interest in the supernatural (and the thin line which separates belief and charlatanism) was further explored in *Thomas... gli indemoniati* ("Thomas... the Possessed," 1969), an admittedly unsuccessful film never screened outside Italy.

In 1976, the Brothers Avati formed their own production company—AMA Film—which financed *La Casa dalle finestre che ridono* ("The House with the Windows that Laugh"), an engrossing and unnerving mystery that firmly established Avati's mastery of the horror genre. Set in the Emilia-Romagna province of Avati's boyhood (with dialogue frequently spoken in the regional dialect), *La Casa...* is the story of a young art student (Lino Capolicchio) summoned by a parish priest to restore a rotting fresco depicting a knife-lacerated St. Sebastian. Bothered by anonymous phone calls advising him to "leave it alone... we like it the way it is," Capolicchio begins an investigation of the fresco's history and discovers that it is the crowning work of a local artist, a madman who worked from life as his demented sisters slaughtered a series of male models suspended by their wrists. Only in an Avati film could such a revelation be the least of its sur-

prises. The film features little overt gore, but its powers of suggestion are so intense that it actually becomes more frightening with subsequent viewings. A chilling masterpiece, *La Casa...* was apparently considered too peculiar to the Italian language to be dubbed for the exploitation market (a subtitled print did surface in France), and too horrific to suit the pretensions of the art house export circuit. After a 1988 airing on RAI-TV, the film finally had its long-awaited British and American premieres... on bootleg videocassettes.

As if personally shaken by the harrowing intensity of *La Casa...*, Avati followed it with a lighter, supernatural farce, *Tutti Defunti... Tranne I Morti* ("Nothing is Moving... but the Dead," 1977), a surrealist parody of Agatha Christie's *TEN LITTLE INDIANS*.

Avati spent the next two years making "straight" films for RAI, then returned to the macabre with *Le Strelle nel Fosso* (1979), a magical, almost entirely improvised film which Avati holds as his personal favorite. Set at the beginning of the 18th Century in the isolated Minerbio region of Emilia-Romagna, *Le Strelle nel Fosso* opens with the death and burial of a country woman, survived by her elderly husband and four sons. Several miserable days later, the house of mourning men is unexpectedly disrupted by the arrival of a beautiful young pianist named Olimpia (Roberta Paladini), requesting shelter from the storm that sunk her cart and piano in the mud. She develops relationships with

each of the men and lifts more than their spirits. Each of them, including the father, proposes to Olimpia, who strangely accepts each invitation and weds the entire family in a mad, multiple ceremony. During a raucous, orgiastic celebration that wends deep toward a promise of dark, rural decadence, Olimpia quietly resumes her journey while the men are too preoccupied with their reawakened joy to notice. The film's weird *denouement* reveals the preceding story as one being told, one hundred years later, by a rat-catcher to a young woman who may be the same Olimpia, unchanged by the years. (Unseen outside of Italy and France (where it was known as *L'Etrange Visite*), *Le Strelle*

of the ribbon on a used electric typewriter engrosses a struggling young novelist (Gabriele Lavia) in a 30 year-old mystery involving a defrocked priest, an abandoned summer camp, and the theory that our planet may harbor timeless geographic areas — "K-Zones" — from which the dead, if buried therein, can return from the Beyond. Though *Zeder* suffers somewhat from Lavia's fixedly grim performance and a forcedly elliptic first third, these are forgivable weaknesses given the startling ambition of its overall design (at 100m, it could've used still another 30), and considering the amount of gooseflesh it manages to raise with the simplest of images. The film's steadfast refusal to exploit or



nel Fosso has been called one of the cinema's masterpieces of magic realism.

Fortunately, Avati's two most recent (and final?) horror projects have been distributed in America.

Zeder [US: Vestron Video's **REVENGE OF THE DEAD**, 1980] is a deliberately paced, bracingly intelligent horror fantasy; it is the only truly original treatment of the "resurrected dead" theme to emerge since George A. Romero's epoch-making **NIGHT OF THE LIVING DEAD** (1968), and it surely ranks with Nigel Kneale's "Quatermass" series among the genre's most stimulating works. The chance reading

exaggerate death with clichéd imagery is but one facet of a naked honesty that grows increasingly brutal as its final horror looms inevitably near. The

climax — which builds to a final shot that can be read as exploitative or existential — packs more punch than you'd imagine a poorly dubbed film ever could. Ironically, this film about death is set in Bologna, where its director was born.

Despite the obstacles of a sparse commercial release and a misleading, Romeroesque ad campaign, *Zeder* became what Romero's own efforts failed to create: one of the key fantasy films of the 1980s. Its

influence is strongly felt in Stuart Gordon's stylish and witty **RE-ANIMATOR** (1986) and in Mary Lambert's condescending adaptation of Stephen King's **PET SEMATARY** (1989), both of which crib their fade-outs from Avati's disturbing fable with unequal success.

Five years earlier, Avati had solicited the advice of Mario Bava for his whimsical sex fantasy **Bordella** ("House of Pleasure for Women," 1975), for which Italy's premier fantasy specialist solved cinematographer Erico Menczer's problem of filming a cameo by "the Invisible Man." [Incidentally, the film starred Al Lettieri and George Eastman (aka Luigi Montefiori), who had been the stars of Bava's uncompleted crime thriller **Canì arrabbiati** ("Mad Dogs," 1974).] Years later, Avati in turn helped Mario's son, Lamberto, to make his directorial debut by providing him with a characteristic script. **Macabro** [US: Lightning Video's **FROZEN TERROR**, 1980] is a remarkably tender *amour fou* about a woman (Bernice Steger)'s carnal devotion to a refrigerated souvenir of her decapitated lover. Avati traces its story with a sickly, ponderous delicacy that entraps the viewer in the fervid claustrophobia shared by a varied cast of neurotics. Persuasively directed by Bava, **Macabro** wears Avati's guiding influence on its sleeve, revelling in cloistered lives, sexual peculiarities and morbid hideosities. The film also makes a closing claim of being based on a true story, which a last-minute burst of excess renders somewhat hard to swallow. The hyperbole on the film's European posters proclaimed **Macabro** as "The film that terrified Dario Argento, Master of the Macabre!"

It is Avati's special gift to convey, better than any other director, the repugnance we feel as we fear the worst, as we look under overturned rocks, peer into the dust swept under rugs, or eavesdrop at the doors of strangers, but his rugs and rocks and doors are pried open to expose the worst secrets housed in the human heart. The Unknown becomes a virtual "Godot" in his films and scripts; the major character either never materializes (viz., Paolo Zeder or the fresco artist), or is invisible to the character with whom he leads us to identify (e.g., the blind characters in **Zeder** and **Macabro**). Avati's preoccupation with recording devices (paint, audio tape, typewriter ribbons, videocassettes) as modes of preserving the dead proves that he is acutely conscious of their relationship to the celluloid reels unravelling in the projection booth. The central theme of Michael Powell's **PEEPING TOM** (1959—the morbidity in-



Bernice Stegers beds her decapitated love in the Avati-scripted FROZEN TERROR (Macabro, 1980), directed by Lamberto Bava.

trinsic to cinema, described by Cocteau as "the registration of death at work"—has been adopted by Avati as nothing less than a vowel in his working vocabulary.

Avati has not made a horror film since **Zeder**, claiming that he is personally frightened of probing deeper into the dark side of his imagination; obviously, this is precisely why he should. Indeed, Avati's subsequent trajectory toward mainstream acceptance may ultimately prohibit him from ever making another horror picture. The enormous European success of his most recent film, **Storia di ragazze e di ragazzi** (**BOYS AND GIRLS**, 1989), promises to firmly establish him as a major talent in the minds of mainstream critics, and this popular embrasure of his abilities will likely come as both a blessing and a curse.

U.S. Videography

FROZEN TERROR (**Macabro**, 1980, script only)
Lightning Video, \$59.95

REVENGE OF THE DEAD (**Zeder**, 1983) Vestron
Video, \$59.95

Opposite: Proof that Two Sisters are scarier than Three Mothers: artistic inspiration at work in LA CASA DALLE FINESTRE CHE RIDONO (1976).



PUPPI AVATI:

Themes of Fantasy

Interview by Giuseppe Salza
Translated from the French by Alan Upchurch

In almost all your films, from *Balsamus*, *L'Uomo di Satana* to *La Casa dalle finestre che ridono*, the fantasy or horror element plays a preponderant role. How do you explain your tendency to make these elements fascinating and curious rather than cruel?

With *Balsamus*, I attempted a sort of anachronistic examination of country life of the past. I brought to light the magic, the exorcisms, and above all the folk customs of my region, Emilia-Romagna.

Your conception of the fantastic then takes as its source and nourishment the mythical traditions of your province?

Indeed! And particularly in the form that I emphasized in *Le Stelle nel Fosso*.

What connection is there precisely between the settings of your stories and Emilia-Romagna?

Actually, my region has lent itself to them hardly at all because it has always been depicted, on the contrary, in the most tranquil, serene and peaceful aspects. Emilia is a land where people eat well and where the scenery is beautiful. And so, scripts aren't set there. That's the reason the desire to set them there came to me, because it was something new, a magical element.

Your whole work has never digressed far from Romagna settings?

No, never. I've directed twelve films and I've shot practically all of them there, with the exception of *Bordella*. On the other hand, where *La Casa dalle finestre che ridono*

TWO INTERVIEWS

ZEDER

Interview by Lorenzo Codelli

Translated from the French by Alan Upchurch

Is the story of *Zeder* an original work and how did this film come about?

It's inspired by a character on whom I had done some previous research, more serious than what comes out in the film: Fulcanelli, the author of *DEMEURES PHILOSOPHALES* ("Philosophic Dwellings") and *MYSTERE DES CATHEDRALES* ("Mystery of the Cathedrals").

He was a French expatriate who lived at the beginning of the century. It's not known if Fulcanelli was his real name... Fulcanelli had reread practically the whole Gothic, all the gothic cathedrals, as if they were alchemic texts. And he was the trustee — it was said — of this alchemic "secret;" and it seems that the American Secret Service, as soon as they entered Paris during



FANTASY

and *Zeder* are concerned, that's a little different. Those are more traditional films — "genre" films, as they say — such as thrillers or horror films. Stories that are more gothic, in a way. The magical element hardly appears in them, only in a very limited way.

In *Balsamus L'Uomo di Satana*, this unique aspect of folk fantasy is shown to be utterly fascinating but not at all evil...

Yes. In fact it was a bit of a play on the presence of this "Christ Child," whose purity then becomes contaminated by the feminine presence, which invades him and causes him to lose his omnipotence. It's basically a fable... an archetype which I largely used again in *Le Strelle nel Fosso*.

Your sense of the grotesque is connected in a way to the individual who is "different," such as those who are marginalized in our own society today?

Exactly! It's a curiosity towards people who are astonishing, "different" as you call them, a curiosity typical of people who live in the country. I practically had a peasant education, in the sense that I spent the first eight years of my life in the country because of the war, and since we didn't have cinema or television, a "show" consisted for the most part of going to look at an idiot on display, or deformed people... That was really something... a dwarf, a hydropic... you know? It's certainly a bit unhealthy, that type of curiosity: laughing at a monster!

A defense of differentness which is expressed in *Balsamus* through the dwarf character played by Bob Tonelli...

Probably so. I used Bob Tonelli in that film above all because, in my opinion, his diminutive stature could be perceived as an image of the Christ Child, if not his overall appearance as a symbol of purity: deformed, thus pure. In fact, in the story, Balsamus has absolutely no relations of any kind with anything and he lives solely in the conviction of his own powers... a conviction which is shaken the moment he is "possessed" by the woman and becomes at the same time a man among men: he acquires a sort of conscience which mortifies his own powers.

After *Balsamus* you directed *Thomas — Gli Indemoniati*, a film about which almost nothing

is known.

We had bad luck with this film. We made it after *Balsamus* on a budget of 115 million lire and Mariangela Melato made her film debut in it. The lead role was played by the English actor Edmund Purdom. The subject revolved around a spiritualist's seance, organized by a group of actors the evening before a "premiere," during which a child materialized, who was sort of adopted by each of them and succeeded in learning and then exposing the private problems of the participants. Its structure was very theatrical, a bit too complex, too wordy... and I don't like the film very much. Today, I probably wouldn't make it.

How were you able to abruptly abandon this type of natural surroundings for a film like *La Casa dalle finestre che ridono* or for the script of Lamberto Bava's *Macabro*?

Because, in those cases, and with the humility of anyone who does this type of work, I forced myself to respect the traditional rules of those genres, which demand total identification of the viewer with the hero of the story. The hero must be an ordinary person. Lino Capolicchio in *La Casa dalle finestre che ridono*, and Gabriele Lavia in *Zeder*, are normal young men caught up in a hellish intrigue. The more incredible the situation is, the greater are the odds of winning. In other words, I try to frighten through events which must be absolutely improbable. The danger doesn't come from normal killers but from hypotheses that are patently absurd. What I like more than anything is to succeed in frightening, in terrifying the viewer through events and situations that are totally unbelievable.

Let's go on to *La Casa dalle finestre che ridono*. How did you arrive at the film's "naive" and surreal atmosphere, so close to Buñuel, while certain of its narrative devices somewhat evoke the style of Dario Argento?

I shaped this film around its ending. The inspiration came to me from a story I was told as a child. During the Second World War, a bomb raid opened all the graves in the cemetery in my village and it was thus discovered that the parish priest, who had died a short while before, was actually a woman. That made a profound impression on me. This fact was the basis around which I constructed the script. I

ZEDER

the Liberation, had looked for Fulcanelli right away. Without success. He had disappeared. No one knows if he's still alive or dead. When I decided to make a new film in the fantasy genre, he served as the pretext for a character. Then, to give myself more freedom, I changed the name to Zeder and I had him engage in experiments based on hypotheses on the beyond and the world of the dead, on "K" zones, oracles of the dead and sanctuaries. The experiments, which resembled those carried out at the beginning of the century, flourished again in our time in Italy as a result of works by Peter Kolosimo and several other specialists in parallel sciences and fantastic archeological literature. The problem consisted of how to transpose this type of research to a context which is my own, Emilia in this case. And it was done purely by chance. The typewriter that you saw in the film (I'll show it to you in a moment!) is the very one I use to write my scripts and which I bought secondhand from one of my musician friends. One evening while trying it out I said to myself: let's see what Amadeo (the previous owner) wrote. And I started to read what was on the ribbon. They were perfectly banal phrases but immediately I thought: and what if, instead, someone acquired a typewriter without knowing the previous owner, in a more anonymous way, and if he was moved by a particular curiosity for used objects? Whenever my father used to buy paintings, he was always concerned with discovering where they had come from. From there an inquiry is begun, conceived to sweep the viewer into a series of highly improbable events specifically designed to frighten him. It's like a spiral staircase that leads down into an unknown territory... in this case, an abandoned camp.

During your childhood you must have lived in a summer camp. One detects certain personal memories in this story.

No, I never went to summer camp. But I spent every summer on the Adriatic, and the huge Fascist buildings that were broken into by gangs of kids reminded me of anthills, which terrified me. I've always had a great fear of summer camps without knowing why. We had a good deal of trouble finding one and finally the one we discovered abandoned by the sea was quite beautiful and quite similar to the description I had made.

What did your more "serious" project on Fulcanelli consist of?

It was a very ambitious story on the origins of the Gothic and the Templars as well as about the research they carried out under the ruins of Solomon's Temple during the eight years they lived in Jerusalem. It's said that when they returned they brought back with them the Ark of the Covenant. But Spielberg has since made **RAIDERS OF THE LOST ARK** whose idea is very similar. Technically, it's an extraordinary film but it's rather naive on the historical level. All the same it doomed the work that I had done. My film would certainly have been more profound, because hypotheses exist on the origin of the Knights Templar that are particularly rich with possibilities for adaptation. And, as the mystery is very great, it could result in a very great film.

Do you yourself possess these alchemic texts?

I have a lot of friends who have conducted this type of research. In particular Stefano Andreani, who is without a doubt the most erudite man in Italy on this subject. We've been talking about it for years. Sooner or later, we'll finish for good by making a film on it. But then Spielberg had to come along! That said, I liked his film very much.

In *Zeder* one recognizes several of your favorite themes (and not only those that appear in your genre films), in particular the connection between the supernatural and everyday reality. But there is also this quest of a character who, a little like in *THE SHINING*, seems to be heading towards a supernatural fate, when in reality he is only making an introspective journey.

Exactly! When Capolicchio, in *La Casa dalle finestre che ridono*, discovers the fresco mural, he understands that it represents his own death. Likewise in *Zeder*, the main character guesses when he starts his investigation that he is setting out on a voyage that will not end. It's an internal course towards something unavoidable, which makes an abstraction of the story's purely detective-like structure. The man knows that he should get rid of this typewriting ribbon, but still he unrolls it, in a cowardly way rather than as a hero; in other words slowly, fearfully, with a thousand precautions so as not to damage it.

FANTASY

agree with the term "naive," as you said, because the story is one of a painter — naive indeed — who is hired to restore an ancient fresco whose author, accursed and a suicide, becomes little by little the catalyst of the strange atmosphere. He is almost never seen, outside of two flashbacks, but he is clearly present at the center of the narrative context. As far as Dario Argento is concerned, that's likely in some of the scenes of violence, stabbings or creaking sounds; a bit excessive perhaps, but we were paying tribute to the current fashion. Nothing more than that.

How long did the shooting last on this film?

One week.

And how much did it cost?

Not much, if not very little. 152 million lire. I remember simply because I produced it myself along with AMA Film, my own production company.

You then directed a fantasy film entitled *Tutti Defunti... Tranne I Morti...*

A film which deviated from it, however, because I always strive to avoid the definition of the genre. I was afraid of entering a kind of "horror" pattern that was too... engaging. So I very much enjoyed making a film which instead mocked and made fun of it... In other words, occasions to be afraid paradoxically become occasions to laugh.

Does this desire to work a parody into the plot of a thriller come from external elements or does it derive, to a certain degree, from your previous work?

It's derived fundamentally from external elements which are manifested again and again, even when we were shooting the most terrifying scenes in *La Casa dalle finestre che ridono*. I was seized by the desire to transform them into comic effects. That's probably why I made *Tutti Defunti... Tranne I Morti* right after, which ridiculed it. There is probably a parental bond between the two films, very similar in the way they were shot, one having been made in summer and the other the following winter.

Before becoming a director, you played for a number of years in a jazz band. Are the improvisations that are in your films a result of your

passion for jazz?

Certainly. In fact, what I love most about jazz is the possibility of improvising naturally with others, within a harmonic whole. In traditional jazz, you shift, you improvise, but always in harmony; it's a harmonic construction, a sequence of chords which are the same for all the musicians playing the piece. In a way, it's the same for my films. There, improvisation is possible and permissible on the condition that it enters in the context of the story. To go off on tangents is undoubtedly nice and fun — I even practiced it a little in my first films — but it's also very dangerous. The audience loses touch with the story very quickly and their interest wanes. The most improvised film I've made is *Le Strelle nel Fosso*. Nothing was written.

Let's talk about that film. What role do you give to the feminine element?

The feminine element is so total, so absolute... For example, the death that suddenly occurs, and also the mother, the wife, the lover, the girlfriend and also, unfortunately, civilization itself which succeeds in contaminating this enchanted land where the four brothers live with their father. You should know that this film, of all those I've made up to now, is the only one that makes me stand out, you could say, in the sense that on the occasion of various discussions on the subject in which I've taken part, I have discovered that there are ways of reading the film that are even more enriching and more complex than what I had hoped for. That makes me especially happy because it's a film I constructed from an idea written on two small sheets of paper. It was the question of a woman, Olimpia, who arrived at a house in the country occupied by a man and his four sons and who left it, the wedding feast over, after having married them and left them for dead. It's a film that was entirely improvised. We shot it in four weeks in a wonderful setting. I had only the slightest idea of what I was doing. Really almost none.

In fact *Le Strelle nel Fosso* is a work in which the fantastic and the surreal attained an unequaled poetry.

I think *Le Strelle nel Fosso* is my best work. It's surely the most inspired, the most sincere and the least rational.



ZEDER

There's one detail in *Zeder* that I didn't understand at all, perhaps because you left it intentionally vague: what's the meaning of this plot hatched by a "good" scientist, a "good" doctor and all the others responsible?

It can be explained in two ways. First of all, it was convenient for the screenwriters; also, therein lies the very irony of the film. When we were working out the story, at a certain moment we asked ourselves: "But who is the 'villain?'" And I said: "They all are!" With the exception of the young girl, the hero virtually encounters only negative characters, which finally deprives him of any possibility of escaping from the machination. Everything is so negative that it becomes paradoxical, almost ironic! The point of the conspiracy seems to be to verify, through a game of ordeals, whether *Zeder's* hypothesis can be faced. One journalist thought he saw in this film a transposition of the politico-masonic manoeuvres of Licio Gelli's P2 lodge, which goes far beyond anything I could have imagined!

In this film, as in all your other fantasy films, you go against the tide of today's dominant tendency towards "gore," which consists of making the horror explicit rather than suggest it as you have done.

They try to show everything. In *Zeder*, on the contrary, the dramatic situation evolves from almost nothing because the film is very chaste, with the exception of one or two stabbings.

In your film technology is used in an attempt to overstep the boundaries of death.

I think the idea of placing a video camera in a coffin represents a form of extreme violence. That's the sect's "sin." Nothing is more indecent than spying on what happens after one is buried, during death. That's the most vulgar thing there is, the very lowest.

How has your conception of the fantastic evolved through the course of your numerous cultural experiences in the matter and what projects do you plan in this area?

As is bound to happen whenever one frequents a genre, what I most want to do immediately after is to flee from it, with the feeling of having done something wrong. I hope to be able to make other fantasy

films, but from very different material so that I could become enthusiastic again. It's a type of cinema which risks becoming terribly repetitive. Most of all, I don't want to be catalogued as "a director of thrillers or horror films." It would be dreadful to have to always propose the same situation. That's why I have no set agenda, although I'm interested in a way in which I could film a great number of things I've read over the last seven or eight years. Fifteen years ago, I proposed a television series which would draw on the fantasy literature of all countries, each of which would be represented by an exemplary tale. At present it would be a perfectly realizable project.

Which of today's fantasy films do you prefer and which don't you like?

I have little interest in anything concerning science fiction, except from the technical angle. *BLADE RUNNER*, for example, moved me very little in terms of its script or adventure, but I was particularly impressed from the technical point of view. Perhaps the most striking example of fantasy cinema is Coppola's film *ONE FROM THE HEART*. It's the most beautiful film I've seen this year [1983], and it's perhaps the most beautiful film I've ever seen about the cinema, the illusion of cinema. That's the type of fantasy cinema I most adore, in which the illusion is quite evident and yet the rules of the spectacle are totally respected. Unfortunately, this film doesn't seem to have been very successful. It also seems to me that there no longer truly exists a fantasy cinema in Italy. Before, there was a bit of room for this genre—when Bava was still alive and Freda was working. Now there's only the example of Fellini left. His is a cinema that refers to the only reality which he mocks, parodies and ridicules. Many young directors propose projects to my production company, but not one of them is a fantasy!

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GANJA & HESS

*"To remember a man's name is to give him eternal life."
—Bill Gunn*



Foreword

The man who wrote those words also wrote and directed **GANJA & HESS**¹—one of the most literate, allegorical, and evasive of all horror films. Chances are, if you live outside New York City and its immediate environs, you've heard of this Black vampire film before; maybe you've always wanted to see it, but never had the chance. You may have also heard about **BLOOD COUPLE**, a shorter, bastardized version, but figured you'd skip it until you caught up with the original. Made almost twenty years ago, **GANJA & HESS** has spent most of those two decades unprojected, due less to a lack of interest than to a concerned determination to preserve the only extant 35mm print. In recent years, rumor circulated of the film's official loss, after this last print was formally withdrawn from exhibition. Fortunately, the film was saved from extinction through the efforts of a modern underground railroad of well-intentioned *cinéastes*, but it is still not widely

Duane Jones as Dr. Hess Green.

The Savaging and Salvaging of an American Classic

By David Walker & Tim Lucas

available. Its fight for survival is far from over, but now the fight to save **GANJA & HESS** is more than a fight to preserve a motion picture; since the premature death of Bill Gunn on April 5, 1989, it's become the collective determination of anyone who's seen or been touched by his work to have his name remembered.

He was born William Gunn Jr. in West Philadelphia in 1929 (or 1934, he pled both). The only child of Bill and Louise Gunn, a couple steeped in the Arts, Bill Jr. preferred the company of his parents to that of other children and became an aloof, uncommunicative student. Accustomed to reading on an adult level at home, Bill Jr. found it difficult to focus on the elementary materials at school. His White educators blamed his inattentiveness at first on his color; his favorite teacher told him that "natural laziness" was a racial heritage he must fight against, which he later said was the point when he learned that he would



Marlene Clark as Ganja Meda.



Bill Gunn, circa 1982.

always be Black before he would be considered as anything else. This traumatic confrontation stifled his natural creativity for many years, which shifted the blame to his mentality; at the 5th Grade level, he was placed in a Special Education program, where the majority of students were mentally retarded. By the time he reached high school, Gunn spent so much time staring out the window that he was asked to leave. His parents removed him from school and signed him into the Navy. Gunn served a year and a half at sea and, upon completion of his duty, moved to New York to focus on acting and writing for the stage.

Bill Gunn made his Broadway acting debut in a 1954 production based on André Gide's *L'IMMORALISTE* at the Royale Theater, in a company which included James Dean. Ten years later, after appearing in several other plays and television shows—including *THE OUTER LIMITS*' "Nightmare" and *THE MAN FROM U.N.C.L.E.*'s "The Double Affair"—he joined that elite group of actors who also

write novels, with *ALL THE REST HAVE DIED*, published by Delacorte Press in 1964. In the period 1969-1970, Gunn experienced the most dramatic upward curve of his career, selling two screenplays that were made into *THE ANGEL LEVINE* (by Jan Kadar) and *THE LANDLORD* (Hal Ashby's first feature, both 1970) and receiving the go-ahead from Warner Brothers for his own directorial debut, *STOP* (also '70), which made him one of the first Blacks ever to be entrusted with a film for a major Hollywood studio; the breakthrough had been made by Gordon Parks, whose *THE LEARNING TREE* was made only one year earlier (also for Warners). Ironically, while Parks' debut was among the first 25 inductees to the National Registry of the Library of Congress in 1988, Gunn's was shelved by Warners without release until it was unearthed for a Gunn retrospective at the Whitney Museum of American Art *twenty years later*. (The film—which was immediately reshelfed—now exists only in rough cut form.) Gunn bounced back with his original NBC teleplay *JOHANNAS*, which won him an Emmy Award for Special Individual Achievement in 1972. After nearly another decade of work, hardship, pain and intermittent glory in other arenas, Gunn's second novel appeared under the imprint of I. Reed Books: *RHINESTONE SHARECROPPING* (1981), based on his bitter experiences as a "Blackman" trying to vault the White-washed walls of Hollywood screenwriting.

Ironically, it was encephalitis ("inflammation of the brain") that took Gunn's life on the eve of his last premiere, *THE FORBIDDEN CITY*; an incendiary play which Joseph Papp directed for New York's Public Theater. Were Gunn's loss not so dear to his audience, one might be tempted to regard his early death as a gift from God, as a buffer from Beyond, because this final work was greeted—the obituary pages notwithstanding—with the kind of notices known to silence playwrights for years, if not forever.

But what else could anyone expect?

As Greg Tate expressed the facts in his obituary of Gunn in *THE VILLAGE VOICE*, "The attempt to bury Bill Gunn began in his life."²

Part I Victim

Without question, the most notorious chapter in the premature burial of Bill Gunn concerns the release and fate of his most celebrated work: the 1973 film, *GANJA & HESS*.

Its story can be broken down very simply.

Dr. Hess Green—a wealthy, Black anthropologist studying an extinct blood-addicted Nigerian culture—is stabbed by one of its surviving artifacts,

a wooden knife that bestows immortality and a need to consume human blood. His would-be murderer commits suicide in remorse, leaving behind his wife Ganja, a woman of natural regal bearing who quickly falls in love with her husband's victim. The immortal Hess yearns to love as well as live forever, and so deifies her with three plunges of the wooden dagger. But love makes the ugliness of their predatory existence too plain to endure. Hess betrays his primal contract by bowing his head and opening his heart to the influence of the Cross—suicide as a denial of ethnic identity. But Ganja cannot follow his example and join him in Death, because of the very qualities of personality that made her desirable to him as his Queen.

The film is a heady balance of themes and interests. Alienation, anomie, religious and cultural identity, hunger, addiction, power—it's about all of these things, often in ways better felt than articulated. Indeed, the film is about sensual experience to such a degree that its narrative seems most linear in its use of music and dissociated images, the message being that, If you try to engage this movie with your brain—with anything but the pagan instincts of your blood and your bowels—you're crashing the wrong party. The cinematic energy on display throughout the movie nets an occasional awkward effect, but this is quickly forgotten in the overall rush of filmmaking enthusiasm. That a film about death and about dying-out should be so pregnant with an embracing appreciation of life's bounty and beneficence, makes it all the more precious. Critic James Monaco—who tends to react indifferently to horror films—described **GANJA & HESS** perfectly as the "great underground classic of Black film and, I think, the most complicated, intriguing, subtle, sophisticated, and passionate Black film of the Seventies. If **SWEET SWEETBACK'S BAADASSS SONG** is [Richard Wright's] **NATIVE SON**, **GANJA & HESS** is [Ralph Ellison's] **INVISIBLE MAN**."³

If his 1934 birthdate is correct, Bill Gunn wrote and directed **GANJA & HESS** at the age of 38. There is a telling passage in **RHINESTONE SHARECROPPING** which offers insight into the possible motivations behind this story and its choice of metaphor:

"At the age of thirty-eight, one realizes that talent is quite capable of turning on itself. Feeding on its own sinews in a desperate attempt to continue. It feels out your inability to support it. When you can no longer feed it, it will feed itself on its own blood." (p. 109)

RHINESTONE SHARECROPPING contains another instructive sentence: "We are both Black and there-

fore in constant danger of starving." **GANJA & HESS** is only obliquely a vampire film; the word "vampire" isn't uttered once during its nearly two-hour running time. The film may be an allegory (as Gunn indicates above) about midlife, its gnawing disappointments, and the consolation a little ganja can bring. Most obstinately, however, it is about the devouring of Black culture by a dominant White Christian society, the absorption of Black artifacts by White institutions, and the residual effects of emotional withdrawal or depletion on survivors of distant or depleted cultures. Hess' climactic "salvation" is chillingly double-edged; his African-imbued immortality is stolen away at precisely the moment he places his faith in the Cross. It's a traditional death for the Undead, but never filmed before or since with quite this intonation.



Despite being made during the heyday of "blaxploitation" film production, **GANJA & HESS** was probably not commissioned as an exploitation picture, though its vampire theme may have been a concession to marketability. Its New York-based executive producers, Quentin Kelly and Jack Jordan, were genuinely interested in cultivating a serious Black cinema. Their only previous release was **GEORGIA, GEORGIA** (1972), an interracial love story scripted by playwright Maya Angelou, which starred Diana Sands (who died in 1973). According to James Monaco, Kelly-Jordan Enterprises, Inc. had also signed contracts with novelist James Baldwin to adapt all his books for the screen.⁴ Had Kelly-Jordan intended **GANJA & HESS** to be nothing more than an imitation of **BLACULA**, it is unlikely they would have hired a triple-threat man (writer-actor-director), especially not one with the extraordinary and uncompromised accomplishments of Bill Gunn; with such conspicuous laurels preceding him, it seems unlikely that Kelly-Jordan would have expected **GANJA & HESS** to be anything but a serious, artistic production.

GANJA & HESS was filmed in Croton-on-Hudson, New York in the Spring of 1972. It was produced by Chiz Schultz, a longtime friend of Gunn, and photographed by James E. Hinton in Super 16mm, who gave the film a radiant, smoldering, diffused look. Assigned the title roles were Marlene Clark—a striking actress whose genre credits (before and after) include **NIGHT OF THE COBRA WOMAN** (1972), **BEWARE THE BLOB!** (1972), **THE BEAST MUST DIE** (1974), and **LORD SHANGO** (also '74)⁵—and Duane Jones, the reclusive talent

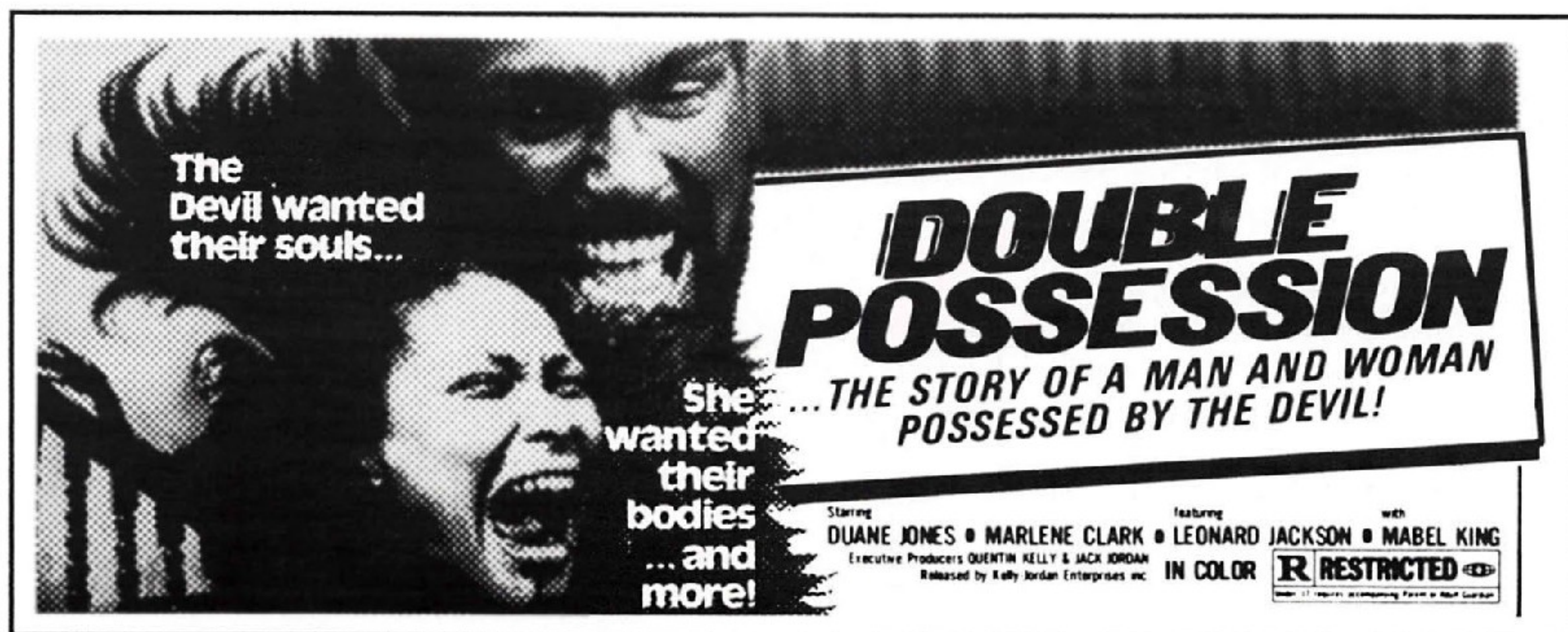
who found instant screen immortality as Ben, the hapless hero of George A. Romero's original **NIGHT OF THE LIVING DEAD** (1968).⁶ It is Bill Gunn himself, however, who delivers the film's most haunting performance, as Ganja's charismatic and deranged husband, George Meda. One of the movie's many pleasures is watching the unpredictable, complicated performances these actors give, performances which seem tightly-scripted—even literary—yet spontaneous and improvisatory at the same time.

The film had its theatrical premiere in New York City in April 1973. Sparsely advertised, it lasted in theaters less than a week before negative reviews, coupled with its distributor's insecurities and mounting financial woes, aborted the release. Against the wishes of Kelly-Jordan, who were already murmuring about having the picture re-edited, Gunn took **GANJA & HESS** to the 1973 Cannes Film Festival, where he arranged for it to be screened during Critic's Week.⁷ Exceeding even Gunn's desperate expectations, **GANJA** won a standing ovation from its audience—legend has it, the applause started long before the film ended. French critics lavished the film with praise, but the response from American representatives continued to be condescending and derisive. Pioneering Black actress-singer Josephine Baker reportedly spent nearly half-an-hour singing the film's praises and chiding the American critics for not supporting Gunn's vision, but of course it was too late. The film had already had its chance in America.

Soon after, Kelly-Jordan sold **GANJA & HESS** off to a second distributor, Heritage Enterprises, who promptly hired post-production specialist Fima H. Noveck to re-edit the lengthy film to more exploit-

able, double-bill proportions. The film's ensuing fate was exactly what Gunn had worked so hard to avoid: it was completely reworked and sold as grist for the blaxploitation mill under the title **BLOOD COUPLE**. This new incarnation played the grind circuit, received little attention, and disappeared until the December success of William Friedkin's **THE EXORCIST** and its plethora of imitators inspired Kelly-Jordan (who somehow reacquired the property) to reissue the shortened version as **DOUBLE POSSESSION** ("...THE STORY OF A MAN AND WOMAN POSSESSED BY THE DEVIL!"). This tactic might have worked, had such a plan been put into effect before July of 1975, by which time the projectile pea-soup sweepstakes was clearly at an end.⁸

Neither **GANJA & HESS** or **BLOOD COUPLE** is quite what it seems. The existing literature on Gunn's film, while varied in value, is unanimous in its ignorance of his own immense contribution to the film's alternate version. Earlier articles, attempting to document the history of **GANJA & HESS**, have unfairly portrayed Noveck as the villain of the piece, a celluloid mercenary who compromised Bill Gunn's film and its original intentions beyond rescue with outtakes and new footage until only a choppy exploitation film remained. The limited availability of **GANJA** for viewing, combined with the purists' lack of interest in **BLOOD COUPLE**, have secured this opinion in too many history books. The unvarnished truth is that **GANJA** is a vampire film that appears to have willfully ellipsed all its references to vampirism, while **BLOOD COUPLE** (which contains *only* footage shot and written by Gunn) rescues from oblivion a number of intense and masterful scenes, shots, and moments that any director would be proud to claim as his work. While **BLOOD COUPLE** could not



seriously be called a masterpiece, as **GANJA** often is, the two films support and fortify one another in unexpected and valuable ways. In essence, anyone who utterly dishonors **BLOOD COUPLE** is either ignorant, or hiding his honest opinion of **GANJA & HESS**.

Much that has been written about **GANJA & HESS** appears to have been based on information found only in **BLOOD COUPLE**, the assumption being that all of **BLOOD COUPLE** had previously appeared in **GANJA & HESS**. This same misinformed thinking has led to a stubborn prejudice against **BLOOD COUPLE** by Bill Gunn's most hard-line supporters, although the film in fact renders the considerable service of rescuing precious fragments of Gunn's work which, without it, would never have been seen, preserved, or appreciated.

In preparing for this article, we learned that ownership of **GANJA & HESS** is now claimed by two separate companies, Pearl Bowser's African Diaspora Images, and the Brooklyn-based company Third World Newsreel. We were also amazed to discover that Bowser had never seen or made any attempt to see **BLOOD COUPLE**, that Third World Newsreel's Ada Griffin had never even heard of this alternate version, and that neither owner was aware of its proliferation under alternative titles on public domain videocassettes!

Any investigation of the story behind **GANJA & HESS** and its fate brings one face-to-face with some very significant questions. First of all, was the film's near-loss the fault of insensitive businessmen or an artist who made the mistake (fortunate or not) of delivering to his producers more than he promised? Also, why hasn't **BLOOD COUPLE** been accepted as a separate draft of Gunn's film in the sense that **STEPHEN HERO** (an alternate draft of **A PORTRAIT OF THE ARTIST AS A YOUNG MAN**) is now accepted by scholars as a separate work of James Joyce?

Thanks to the cooperation of Third World Newsreel, we were given the privilege of comparing **GANJA & HESS** and **BLOOD COUPLE**, side by side, for the first time.

The synopses of **GANJA & HESS** and **BLOOD COUPLE** are essentially the same. To chart the editorial variations between the two films, we have opted to present a detailed synopsis of **GANJA & HESS** (hereafter **G&H**)—which we feel is also necessary in view of its present rarity—italicizing those scenes and shots which appear *only in Gunn's original cut*. By reading this synopsis minus the italicized passages, the reader can trace the editorial decisions made by Fima Noveck for **BLOOD COUPLE** (hereafter **BC**). Noveck's larger embellishments will be discussed after the synopsis.



G&H begins with a printed introduction spread over nine consecutive intertitles: "Doctor Hess Green.../ Doctor of Anthropology Doctor of Geology.../While studying the ancient Black civilization of Myrthia.../ was stabbed by a stranger three times.../one for God the Father one for the Son.../and one for the Holy Ghost.../stabbed with a dagger, diseased from that ancient culture whereupon he became addicted/and could not die.../nor could he be killed." (These intertitles appear in **BC** approximately halfway through its running time, after the events it describes have already been played out on the screen.) A portion of the main titles appears over four shots of angel statuary (a Gunn motif), which bridge our passage to a church service, with Reverend Luther Williams (Sam Waymon, who composed and performs the superb music score). The first of many voiceovers accompanies this footage and continues over succeeding footage of a Rolls Royce travelling down a highway: "My official title is Reverend Luther Williams. I also work as a chauffeur and stable man. I work for Dr. Hess Green, and he's an addict. He's not a criminal; he's a victim. He's addicted to blood." (It should also be pointed out here that Rev. Williams' voiceover stands out in **G&H** as a rather jagged flaw; at this point in the film, Hess is not yet "addicted to blood.") Under the latter portion of the voiceover, we see Hess in the sumptuous backseat of the Rolls.⁹ Over this shot appears a subtitle: *PART 1 VICTIM. This is followed by brief shots of Hess aiding the survivor of a bloody car wreck in the city.*

The Rolls pulls up to the Brooklyn Museum and Hess steps out. *Intercut with this, a man soon to be introduced as George Meda (Bill Gunn) is shown pointing a revolver at a mirror somewhere inside the museum.* Jack Sargent (John Hoffmeister), a White curator for the museum, greets Hess inside and accompanies him down a hall. Only a brief snatch of their dialogue can be heard *before a voiceover of Rev. Williams supplants it.* (In **BC**, this dialogue survives, although probably not in its original form, considering that Jack Sargent's voice is dubbed here by a different actor. The two colleagues exchange comments on Hess' work-in-progress, a book about Nigeria and the Myrthian culture. They also discuss two things which a "Mr. Woods" has for Hess: a dagger made of petrified wood: an authentic Myrthian relic, and a research assistant named George Meda.) Over a closeup of Meda, Sargent says, "Dr. Green, I want you to meet your new assistant, Mr. George Meda." Hess, Meda, and Rev.

Williams (acting as chauffeur) return to the Rolls Royce, and the remainder of the credits appear over shots of the men travelling from the city to Hess' lush estate in the Hudson River Valley. (All of the main titles appear over this transitory footage in BC.) The musical accompaniment here is a song about the addiction to blood which wiped-out the ancient Myrthian culture, represented as a spiritual by Waymon; this song is used elsewhere in the Noveck version, and is replaced by moody, cheap-sounding synthesizer noodlings.

Meda and his introspective host are finishing dinner in Hess' living room, well-stuffed with fabulous art pieces and anthropologic bric-a-brac ranging from European Christian art to African masks and fetishes (a clear indication of the clashing religio-cultural influences in Hess' life). *As if to draw Hess out, Meda (so-called because he hates "George") tells a raunchy anecdote about a friend who once directed a film in Holland, where he was obliged to call "Cunt!" at the end of a take, because "Cut!" means precisely that obscenity in Dutch. Hess offers little response.*

Cut to Hess, lying in bed, studying the Myrthian dagger. A dream montage begins: Jack Sargent, wearing an elegant party mask, greets Hess at the museum; *we see that Hess too is masked*; the symbolic Queen of Myrthia (Mabel King) stands in a field, beckoning—an awesome, startling figure, weighted in beads and plumed with a looming head-dress of radiating, fern-like strands, she is the film's most indelible image. She moves in slow-motion through tall grasses, followed by two native subordinates. Hess wakes with a start and goes to the living room. Meda is gone.

In one of the picture's most inspired scenes, Hess wanders into the pitch of night and in his yard finds Meda, above his head, straddling a tree limb. To a parallel branch, he has tied a noose. Meda is drunk, gazing at the moon, considering suicide. (BC includes three cutaway shots of the full moon during this scene, G&H only one.) Hess eventually talks him down. Back inside, Meda monologizes to Hess about his sense of being "a victim on the one hand, and on the other... a murderer." This confession catapults us to a later point in the night, when Meda attacks Hess (asleep in his bed) with what appears to be an axe. Hess dodges this, but their ensuing struggle ends with Meda grabbing the Myrthian dagger and stabbing Hess three times in the chest. *During the stabbing, there is a brief cutaway to a framed photograph of jazz saxophonist Stanley Turrentine.* (Noveck here substitutes a hazy closeup of the Queen of Myrthia, lest the viewer have too many allusions to keep up with.) Immediately dis-

traught, Meda collapses on the bed.

Meda sits at a table, typing. Sunlight is streaming in through a window behind him. He peels his page from the roller and reads aloud, in a voice trembling with sensitivity, formality, and marijuana, what he has written—a kind of suicide note:

TO THE BLACK MALE CHILDREN

*Philosophy is a prison:
It disregards the uncustomary things about you.
The result of individual thought is applicable
only to itself.*

*There is a dreadful need in Man to teach;
It destroys the pure instinct to learn.
The Navigator learns from the stars.
The stars teach nothing.*

*The Sun opens the mind and sheds light on the
flowers.
The Eyes shame the pages of any Book.
Gesture destroys Concept.
Involvement mortifies Vanity.*

*You are the Despised of the Earth;
That is as if you were water in the desert.
To be adored on this planet is to be a symbol of
Success,
And you must not succeed on any terms, be-
cause Life is endless.*

*You are as nameless as a flower.
You are the child of Venus, and her natural
affection is Lust.*

*She will touch your belly with her tongue,
But you must not suffer in it;
For Love is all there is, and you are
Cannon fodder in Its defense.*

Cut to Meda kneeling in a filled bathtub. He brushes his teeth in the bath water, takes a revolver from the edge of the tub, steps out and kneels on the bathroom floor, and puts the gun to his mouth. In the bedroom—to his own surprise—a very-much-alive Hess examines his chest in the mirror. No wounds. Meda, having instinctively moved the gun to his heart, fires and falls forward onto the checkered floor. Hess hears the shot and dashes to the bathroom, where he sees blood pooling out from under Meda's body. He falls to his knees and begins

*Opposite: Gospel and blues singer Mabel King
as Queen Helga of Myrthia.*



*Hess tries to
dissuade
George Meda
(Bill Gunn,
background)
from suicide.*



lapping it up. (As seen in **BC**, this scene features snippets of footage not used for **G&H**—and vice-versa. No new action, just different camera angles and cutaways. More significant are their musical differences, with Noveck using a minimum of synthesizer stings to naked effect, replacing Gunn's original knock-out use of Mabel King—the Myrthian Queen herself—singing “March Blues.” The mournful piece plays as naturalistic, ambient music until Meda's shot is fired, at which point it increases in volume and anguish and distortion, echoing in more than one way the scene's parallel distortions of editing rhythm.)

Next we see Hess moving through a tall grassy field near his home, much like the Queen's stomping grounds seen earlier in fantasy cutaways. *For an instant, we cut back to Meda's bath, where a wooden crucifix (previously hung on the wall) has fallen and is floating.* Hess prays aloud in the field, then emits two intense screams of pain and grief, followed by a brief shot of him wearing an African robe, standing calmly with his head inclining forward as if in deference to a royal presence. (**BC** makes use of some slightly different footage in the field sequence—most significantly, shots of Hess shooting himself repeatedly in the chest to no mortal effect, presumably filmed by Gunn as a suicidal rebellion against his vampirism, and reinstates a Hess voiceover.)

Suddenly (with Sam Waymon's excellent theme song “You Got to Learn to Let It Go” making its first bright appearance on the soundtrack)¹⁰, we see Hess—in bum's disguise—donating to a blood bank. *The subtitle PART II SURVIVAL appears..* The nurse leaves the room. *Hess causes a small explosion in a wastebasket.* He raids the bank's refrigerator of its blood supply. *Cut to an elegant lawn party on the grounds of Hess' estate. In attendance is Hess' pre-teen son, Rico (Enrico Fale), who we learn attends a boarding school. Father and son converse briefly in French. Hess wanders away from his guests as the soundtrack swells with the “Bungelii Work Song”—an authentic, African chant-song, which the film often uses to indicate a coming-on of the blood thirst.*¹¹ Inside his house, Hess pours the bottled blood into a glass, and drinks it (in **BC**, with some inserted “hesitation”).

Later, Hess visits a seedy city bar. *In the restroom, a milling group of locals call him “a slick brother.”* Hess buys time with a small-time hooker, in whose bedroom her pimp ambushes him, hungry for this dandified john's money roll. Hess is stabbed in the back to no avail, but both the pimp and hooker wind up dead. In closeup, Hess punctures the hooker's neck with a pocket knife. *Blood squirts from her throat in regular intervals.* Hess stares at the spectacle, becomes ill and runs down the hall to retch over an already filthy toilet.



*"In sickness and in health"—
The newlyweds
drag Meda's
bled body to its
final resting
place.*

Later at home, Hess receives an insolent, demanding phone call from Ganja Meda (Marlene Clark), George Meda's wife. She insists on speaking to her husband. Hess leads her to believe that her husband has disappeared after "going crazy again." Having just flown in from Amsterdam, without enough money for a decent hotel, she asks Hess sharply to put her up for a few days, till Meda reappears. Hess sends a limousine to pick her up. After arriving and changing clothes, Ganja joins Hess in his living room. Hess pours drinks. Here, the Noveck version includes a short but revelatory dialogue segment, in which Hess tells Ganja that his own wife is dead; also, the Noveck scores this scene with Bach's "Jesu, Joy of Man's Desiring," *whereas Gunn scores it with "March Blues."* While smoking a joint, Ganja tells Hess about a friend who smuggled grass back from Mexico in a condom suppository, whom she admires for his ingenuity. The two gradually embrace on the well-cushioned living room floor. Hess' bloodlust is inflamed along with his libido, and he dashes away from Ganja to the attic for a covert glass of blood. She waits but eventually joins him there, and they make love.

Cut to Hess's veranda, where he and Ganja are dining, attended to by Hess's stiffly—and amusingly—"correct" butler, Archie (played to perfection by Leonard Jackson). In this, the movie's funniest segment, Ganja deliberately baits Archie

with orders and condescending remarks. (In **BC**, this segment is shorter and is edited differently, with two shorts of Archie's face awkwardly inserted; *in G&H*, Archie's face is not shown at all. Furthermore, **BC** begins the segment with a lovely and telling poetic voiceover, in which Hess asserts that Ganja's beauty did not evolve easily, but that thousands had to die to lead to such perfection. These lines never appear in **G&H**.)

Next, Hess and Rev. Williams have a brief conversation outside; Hess is heading to his parked convertible and Rev. Williams, carrying saddles, is presumably heading to the stables. (Here, in **BC**, Rev. Williams says to Hess, "I gave my life to God, and you're living in sin;" no such line appears in **G&H**.) Hess gets into his convertible, has a brief exchange with Ganja—standing on a ledge above him—about his feelings about marriage (and greasy cooking), and drives off. (At this point in **BC**, a shot of Rev. Williams adjusting the saddles in a shadowy stable appears; he is alone and singing a hymn; this shot is unique to **BC**.)

Cut to Hess approaching a white welfare mother (Tara Fields) and her baby, on the outside steps of a run-down tenement building. Hess follows her inside. Meanwhile, Ganja continues to tease and thwart Archie while unpacking the groceries they've bought for the dinner she intends to cook for Hess. (This scene is slightly shorter in **BC** and is accompa-

nied by a rhythm-and-blues instrumental; *in G&H, this scene has no background music.*) Ganja has forgotten to buy wine and, after being informed by Archie that "Dr. Green keeps a very good wine cellar," pays it a visit despite the manservant's objections. In a walk-in freezer, she finds Meda's frozen corpse and screams.

Back to Hess, at the apartment house. *He is sitting on the bed next to the bloodied body of the woman.* The loud crying of the woman's baby can be heard as Hess dresses and leaves. *Throughout this scene, the camera slowly tilts right and left as though it is the eyes of the baby rocking in its cradle.* (BC retains only the final frames of this scene and wipes the baby's crying from the soundtrack, reducing the scene's impact immensely and its subtext of hunger completely.)

That evening, at the dinner table, Ganja confronts Hess with the fact that she has discovered her husband's body is in his freezer. She informs Hess that Archie cooked the dinner, because she couldn't "get it together." Hess offers little reaction. Ganja gets up from the table and paces back and forth in an adjoining room. Then she returns to the dining room and sits down next to Hess. *To him, she delivers an eloquent monologue about childhood snowball fights in Boston, growing up with a mother who did not want and misjudged her, and determining to "take whatever steps had to be taken, but always take care of Ganja."* In an impressively swift and startling change of tone, we cut to Ganja and Hess lovingly cavorting about the house, having their own snowball fight with Hess' furnishings, with Sam Waymon's upbeat jazz in the background. The music continues as we cut again, to the poolside wedding of Ganja and Hess. (In a remarkably understated and rather innovative bit of symbolism, the Queen of Myrthia can be seen in attendance at this Christian ceremony. Look closely at the background of the scene's very first shot: over Hess's shoulder, standing far back under a tree, alone, the Queen of Myrthia can be seen in full native regalia. Thankfully, this brilliant moment appears in both versions of the film.) As vows are exchanged, there is a powerful flash cutaway to Ganja and Hess dragging Meda's cellophane-shrouded body through a field at night to a hidden resting place, *accompanied ironically by Bach's "Jesu..."* This juxtaposition of the sacred and the profane seems to wed the couple on both fronts.

We cut to Hess and Ganja in bed together on their wedding night. They kiss and Hess says, "You know I want you to live forever... I mean, I really want you to live forever." They embrace and the classical music gives way to the "Bungelii Work Song." Dissolve — without violence — to: Hess, naked, head

bent down, sitting on the bed next to Ganja's bloodied body. *Cut to: Ganja inside, looking at herself in a mirror, grimacing. Cut to: Ganja kneeling outside on the grass, lapping water from a stream or puddle.* The "Bungelii Work Song" ends. Ganja and Hess, wearing African robes, walk slowly side-by-side in an area of grassy fields and trees that might as easily be Hess' property or an African veldt. In voiceover, Ganja says "I had a strange dream last night. I dreamed you murdered me." (In BC, this voiceover is longer and becomes a dialogue between Ganja and Hess.) As the two walk languorously along, there are nice shots of the camera pointing toward the sun, tracking under tree limbs. Soon, *there is a voiceover of Hess speaking: "The only perversions that can be comfortably condemned are the perversions of others. I will persist and survive without God's or society's sanctions. I will not be tortured. I will not be punished. I will not be guilty."* Ganja and Hess appear to enact a minimal ceremony with recitations and an offering of flowers, which culminates in Hess stabbing Ganja three times with the Myrthian dagger. (In G&H, Gunn depicts this violent "ceremony" like a positive, even joyous, event — due in part to the exuberant version of "You Got To Learn To Let It Go" that accompanies it on the soundtrack; in BC, this music is omitted in favor of distorted screams, giving this second marriage an intensely negative connotation.)

Cut to: Ganja lying in bed, gasping. The "Bungelii Work Song" plays. Hess comes up into the room on an elevator and gives Ganja a pill to help her to sleep. Dissolve to Ganja, later, being administered a glass of blood by Hess, which she accepts. He then tells her, "We're having a guest for dinner. I think you need a little distraction." (These lines appear in BC, but are reversed; a closer examination reveals that an alternate take was used, with Duane Jones speaking his lines in reverse order.) Next we see Ganja and Hess at the dinner table with their guest (Richard Harrow), a fairly young, bearded Black man. *He tells Ganja about his volunteer work with a community recreational center.* (In BC, no dialogue can be heard in this scene, only music.) Dissolve to an elaborate, elegant sequence — filmed in artfully fragmented style — in which Ganja and the dinner guest make love in a room of the house. (This sequence is a bit shorter in BC and somewhat less explicit.) Eventually the lovemaking gives way to blood drinking as Ganja begins to lick from scratches on her partner's back (cue the "Bungelii Work Song"). Intercut flash shots of *Ganja smelling a flower, with blood on her lips, a distorted face on a statue or vase crying real blood, and Ganja*

screaming in the wind with blood flowing down her chin. Cut back to the lovemaking room for a surreally beautiful shot of Ganja's lover/victim rolling inertly off her body, his body literally sparkling with a covering of blood. Hess stands at the door to the room looking down at Ganja and the body on the floor. Ganja, anguished and ashamed, runs out of the room and Hess goes in, saying nothing, closing the door behind him. (In BC, Hess asks Ganja, "You save any for me?")

Daylight. In long shot, Hess and Ganja drag their guest's body, bagged in transparent polyethylene, through a tall field. As they are about to leave the body behind in the middle of the field, Ganja notices that it appears to be breathing. She tells Hess the body is alive, but he denies it and pulls her away from it. (In BC, this scene is slightly abbreviated and the sound of the body's breathing is muffled.) Dissolve to Ganja and Hess sitting in near-darkness in front of a blazing fireplace. Ganja asks Hess what it is he's reading, and he replies, "It's a guide to our destruction. A solution. Helga, Fourth Queen of Myrthia: 'If you worship any god whatsoever... and if this god in which you trust be destroyed by forces dangerous to the survival of love, and if the implement by which this god was destroyed... does cast a shadow on the heart, then he shall be released into the bosom of his creator.'" Ganja asks, "If the shadow of the cross is against our hearts, it'll destroy us?"

Cut to a church service in session. A children's choir sings "You Got To Learn To Let It Go." There is an exterior shot of Hess approaching the church. Inside, Rev. Williams says, "I ain't gonna let evil in here. Evil is not coming between those doors back there." There are several shots of their feet as Rev. Williams and some of his congregation dance on the stage. Then Rev. Williams says, "If there's anyone that would like to be prayed for, would you come?" Led by the Reverend, the church segues into "Just As I Am." We see Hess walking down the aisle and standing in front of the stage, below the Reverend. Asking Hess to give his life to Jesus, Rev. Williams places his hand on Hess's head. As the singing goes on, Hess seems more and more overcome by emotion and eventually raises his hands, turns, and walks out, looking up, smiling. (BC intercuts Hess' salvation with solarized flashes of all his victims, as if his sins are being burned out of his mind and soul.) Cut to a sustained slow-motion shot of Hess running joyously through a field, his clothes loose and flowing.

Next we see Hess sitting in a darkened room, eyes closed, breathing deeply. A long shot reveals that he is sitting in the shadow of a large wooden cross that he's suspended from the ceiling. We hear

the sounds of a male voiceover singing or chanting intensely, possibly in a foreign language. Ganja stands beside the cross, watching silently and warily. Hess pleads with her, "Come with me. Please, please, come with me." Staring at the cross, wide-eyed, he gets up, smiling, and approaches it. The chanting gets louder and more intense and then is replaced by a series of ragged wheezing or moaning sounds that give way to a blood-curdling, shrill crying sound as Hess reaches out toward the cross and falls to the floor. (These disturbing wheezing and screaming sounds are replaced in BC by mild, almost melodic synthesizer music, shading Hess' self-exorcism with feelings of positive release, not the pain and horror of separation Gunn intended.) The camera pans the length of Hess' prostrate, unmoving body, followed by an evocative shot of leaves blowing across the floor of the room. (This appears in BC as the final shot, suggesting Ganja's unseen departure through a door left open.)

Cut to an arresting shot of an ambulance arriving, with the camera inside the ambulance, looking out. Ganja, wearing an overcoat, stands outside waiting. (The encircled First Aid cross on the window of the vehicle ironically positions itself over Ganja as it comes to a halt.) The attendants bring Hess' body out of the house on a stretcher and ask Ganja some routine questions. Ganja stands alone in the drive as the ambulance leaves. Cut to inside the house. Ganja still wearing the overcoat, opens a window and gazes out. Cut to a high exterior shot of Hess' swimming pool. As the camera zooms in, we see that the pool's waters are churning. In slow motion, the dinner guest emerges from the pool, completely nude, and runs across the lawn toward the camera. He leaps and the frame freezes. The film ends with three discontinuous exterior shots of Ganja looking out the window, her expression unreadable. In the second of the three shots, she looks directly into the camera; in the third she seems to smile slightly.

Cut to: a children's church choir about to begin singing a hymn, "There Is a Fountain Filled with Blood." The end credits begin to appear over this footage. After a short time, Gunn's panning camera catches a little boy in an inadvertent mugging glance and freezes frame on him. At this point, a studio group version of "You Got To Learn To Let It Go" comes up on the soundtrack and the screen fades out. The remainder of the credits are presented in a crawl, after which the song continues to play over a black screen for another two full minutes.

Fima Noveck Interviewed

By David Walker

Under his true name F.H. Novikov, Russian-born Fima Noveck is the credited director of **BLOOD COUPLE** [aka **DOUBLE POSSESSION**], the revised 1974 edition of **GANJA & HESS**. Noveck was early enamored of movies and broke into the film industry as an editor and director of photography, later immigrating to New York, where he established himself as a one-man postproduction house specializing in tailoring imported features to suit the American palate. In addition to **BC**, Noveck has "doctored" numerous imported features. His most noted success was his postproduction supervision of several Lina Wertmüller films, from **THE SEDUCTION OF MIMI** (1972) to **BLOOD FEUD** (1979). Noveck has resided in Los Angeles since 1986.

This interview was conducted by telephone on September 22, 1990.

In the last several years, BLOOD COUPLE has started turning up on several video labels under several different titles.

That I didn't know about. As a matter of fact, I had completely forgotten about this film until you approached me for this interview. It's not even on my résumé.

Your work on BLOOD COUPLE shows a lot of creative energy; did you

Part II Survival

To anyone privileged to have seen **GANJA & HESS**, seeing **BLOOD COUPLE** can be a strange and perplexing experience.

"...the Queen. It seems she needed such huge quantities of blood that her slaves were bled to death."

The film starts thusly, in mid-sentence, with the story's protagonist Dr. Hess Green reading aloud—pensively—from a book, smoking, his rich voice resonating with inflections of authority and bewildered pity over the ambient ticks of a grandfather clock. (A furnishing of heritage, the pronouncement of blood, a stabbing sound: it's all there, the horror to come.)

The intricate opening scenes of the original cut, in which Gunn managed to interweave perhaps four different narrative points-of-view within the space of a minute, are fully unwoven in **BLOOD COUPLE**, pruned with surgical precision to a state of uncomplicated lucidity. No sloppy hatchet job, this. The opening credits are reorchestrated over different music, with unfamiliar names appearing, and the direction is newly credited to one F.H. Novikov (aka Fima H. Noveck, then a NYC-based film doctor).

Bill Gunn was understandably upset about the film being taken away from him, and did not assist in the re-editing. Apart from the shock of seeing Gunn's film totally interpolated, it is reasonable to say that Noveck, for better or worse, put a great deal of care and creative energy into **BLOOD COUPLE**. Of course, the irony is that, while the devoted intensity of Noveck's reassembly of the film denotes a certain degree of respect for Gunn's work, a crass, uncaring cut-and-slash job might've retained more of the original's flavor. (This despite the fact that Noveck made a special effort to retain many of the unusual narrative techniques of the director's cut, such as voiceovers, cutaways to paintings and statues, and intertitles.) Nevertheless, **BLOOD COUPLE** does constitute a reduction of the real work, which it has essentially replaced in a market drastically undernourished for mature and intelligent works of fantasy, not to mention talent and daring.

BLOOD COUPLE is 33m shorter than the director's original cut, but this should not be taken as an easy index to the revised version's shortcomings. In fact, **BLOOD COUPLE** incorporates approximately 15m of footage shot for (but not used in) **GANJA & HESS**! Six major outtakes, detailed here, seem particularly noteworthy. In general, this once-jettisoned footage enhances the film's exposition to remind the viewer that this is a *vampire* film, as the word "blood" figures prominently in the restored scenes. Also, much more information is provided about the Myrthian dagger, the entire point of which would have been entirely lost in Gunn's version without its opening intertitles.

While the supplementary material in **BLOOD COUPLE** does much to clarify the elliptic storytelling in **GANJA & HESS**, the viewer should take this with a grain of salt. In a lecture he gave when presenting his film at the University of the District of Columbia in the early '80s, Gunn claimed to have peppered his original screenplay with a fair amount of traditional horror-movie subterfuge, simply to get the project made, thinking that the presence of such pages might discourage production interference, and knowing that he would be free to eliminate such scenes during post-production. Gunn's intention was to make a film about cultural displace-

ment — not vampirism. Therefore, although the following scenes do reinforce **GANJA & HESS** and each stands as a further confirmation of Gunn's talent, it is probably a mistake to think that Gunn didn't know what he was doing by deleting them. The vagaries of Gunn's intentions regarding the content of his screenplay may soon be clarified, since his original script is scheduled to be included in **SCREENPLAYS OF THE AFRICAN-AMERICAN EXPERIENCE**, an anthology edited by Phyllis Klotman, which Indiana University Press will publish in the Winter of 1990-91.

Until then, here — briefly described — are the six major additional scenes to be found in **BLOOD COUPLE**:

- After Hess has been greeted in the Brooklyn Museum by Jack Sargent, we see the two of them, George Meda, and a "Mr. Woods" (uncredited, a middle-aged White man) meeting in Woods' rather dark office.

WOODS: Dr. Green, it's so good to see you at last. Would you like to see what we've found? I think these may be the finest of relics to date of the Myrthian age. This is a piece of petrified wood. Notice the curious markings on the wood. Absolutely magnificent.

As this somewhat awkward dialogue does not seem to match Woods' lip movements, it seems possible that it was re-written (by Fima Noveck?) and redubbed. (30s)

- Hess' dinner with Meda — although shorter than it appears in **G&H** — continues past the point where Gunn cuts it off.

HESS: Blood has a dreadful connotation, more like a passion for soiled underwear, or urine... desiring and drinking blood is a very anti-social act.

MEDA: I don't know. Suppose that we lived in a blood society.

HESS: We do live in a blood society. Nevertheless, if the idea ever caught on here, it would probably be considered a perversion. A blood sucker. A degenerate. (45s)

- Immediately after the scene described above, Meda and Hess relax together in Hess' living room. Meda is painting a watercolor of a suffering figure in front of a cross. Hess is scrutinizing the Myrthian dagger.

HESS: In analyzing this, it was found that even though it's obviously wood, it contains elements of human bone. Calcium, gelatin...

Take a special interest in this project?

I take an interest in every project. I don't, shall we say, divide my energy into different points of intensity. When I take something on, that's it. In other words, I don't accept projects that I don't want to work on, because I put all of my energy into everything that I do; I live with it, for whatever period of time it takes.

How much time did you spend working on BLOOD COUPLE?

Six, maybe eight weeks. This picture was not only cut; the music was applied differently, it was re-edited, effects were added, all kinds of things. It was not a question of re-structuring the picture; it was a complete postproduction process.

Did Bill Gunn assist you with any of the re-editing?

No, but he liked what he saw when I showed it to him.

He was complimentary?

Yes. I'm always given *carte blanche* by directors. Then I come back and show them what I did.

What was your personal opinion of Gunn's cut?

Well, my own storytelling style is one of simplicity. I like a beginning, a middle, and an end — in that order. Of course, you're asking me what my feelings were 17 years ago, and I remember only impressions. My first impression was that I didn't quite know what the picture was about. It was confusing to me. If I remember correctly, my feeling was

that it was an attempt at being esoteric for the sake of being esoteric. In other words, the message that had to be conveyed to the audience demanded to be simplified. I remember having a feeling that the story was going somewhere, but that I couldn't see where it was going until I thoroughly analyzed it. So that's what I did.

You reinstated a considerable amount of Gunn's outtakes.

Usually, when a picture comes to me to go through a second postproduction, I discover that the best takes were not used originally. I invariably find gems in the outtakes of any film, so I always examine the outtakes, and I also print the B negative if it wasn't done before.

I assume there was no new footage shot for BLOOD COUPLE.

No, there wasn't.

I noticed that alternate takes were used, and some of the footage was solarized.

I always look at all the outtakes and, in this case, I found some stuff that I thought would fit the picture better than what was there before. The solarization I think I created. Now I remember: it was a negative/positive effect. It was done at an optical house.

Did you make a special effort to retain the original film's flavor?

In this case, yes, because the flavor was the thing that



Gunn the actor (background) watercolors at Hess' lectern in this scene, which appears only in BLOOD COUPLE (1975).

Then, Hess accidentally pricks his thumb with the knife.

MEDA: Well, I have to confess that this assignment was my second choice. My first was a trip to Alexandria. The only reason why I accepted this assignment is because I'm reading your book on Nigeria.

Hess excuses himself, saying he has some work to do before he sleeps, and they agree to have breakfast around nine the next morning. Interestingly, Meda is more composed and low-key in this scene than in any that appear in the Gunn version. (2m 12s)

- After the scene with Meda sitting in the tree, Hess and Meda are back in Hess' living room having a drink.

MEDA: Tell me, are you more interested in the blood of Christ than in his body?

HESS: I've lost all interest in the flesh, if that's what you mean.

MEDA: All right, so much for what you've lost. Tell me what you've gained.

HESS: That's none of your business.

MEDA: (Reading aloud from something on a table)
"Explosions of light that signal—this is the



Gunn the filmmaker, with Duane Jones (left), directs the Brooklyn Museum exteriors for the main titles sequence.

beginning of death." Why do the Myrthians refer to it as the beginning of death rather than the end of life?

HESS: I suppose they knew something we don't.

MEDA: Do you think that it would be a terrible thing to drink blood?...

HESS: Well, I suppose it would be less of a sacrilege to drink blood than to spill it. What do you think?

MEDA: I don't know. I just wanted to work with you on this project, that's all. (2m 8s)

● After Ganja tells Hess at the dinner table that she knows her husband's body is in the basement, her important "snowball" monologue is replaced by this understated, powerful exchange, the best of the restored outtakes and perhaps the one most worthy of inclusion in the original cut.

We see Ganja sitting in a chair with Hess standing behind her, leaning on the chair slightly.

GANJA: Why did you kill him?

HESS: I didn't kill him. Your husband committed suicide. I swear to you that's the truth.

GANJA: I believe you.

was so good about it. The flavor of the storytelling was the same. I always try to maintain the director's vision. I try to take a bird's eye view and see what the director wanted to say—something that maybe his editor, or whoever it was, wasn't able to tell very well—and I try to produce on the screen the director's vision as concisely and clearly as I can. I'm always faithful to the director.

That's your first loyalty.

Absolutely. Well, that's not completely true. My first loyalty is to the audience, actually, and then to the director, so that his work can be shown and be entertaining. But from a purely creative point, yes, it's the director.

What factors influence the billing you receive on a film? For example, you are credited on Mauro Bolognini's *THE INHERITANCE* [*Eredità Ferramonti*, 1976] as editor and creative consultant, yet you are billed on *BLOOD COUPLE* as being its editor and director.

I don't remember how or why I got that director's credit. I do remember changing my name so that it wouldn't appear twice. Well, I didn't really change it; my real name is Novikov, and I shortened it for use in the country. I suppose somebody thought I deserved it because I re-directed the film so completely; I guess that's what it was.



HESS: I didn't expect you would.

GANJA: I'm full of surprises... Why is his body in the freezer?

At this point, the screen goes black. We can hear the exchange as it takes place in the dark.

HESS: (mock dramatically, with a tone of irony) When I found your husband's body, I took his blood.

GANJA: What did you do with it?

HESS: I drank it.

GANJA: I think you're as crazy as he was.

Archie brings a candelabra which lights up the scene.

ARCHIE: It's the power, sir. They'll have them back on in a few minutes.¹²

Hess, still standing behind Ganja's chair, lets down her hair and kneads it.

GANJA: Marry me.

HESS: Do what?

GANJA: Marry me. (1m 35s)

● Immediately after Hess succumbs to the shadow of the cross, there is a haunting shot of Ganja running around the room, recoiling against the wall, in panic, unable to escape the all-encompassing shadow of the cross, which follows her reproachfully back and forth across the room. The shot ends with Ganja cringing in the corner, leaving her fate ambiguous. (22s)

In terms of personality, **BLOOD COUPLE** is quite different from **GANJA & HESS**. Noveck's cut flows along on a sustained somber note, asserting a ponderous atmosphere of tension at all costs, while Gunn's film—with its sudden and exhilarating modulations in tone and rhythm (as when Ganja's

intense soliloquy at dinner is followed by her cavorting happily with Hess through his dark and deathly still house)—is ebullient and mercurial, ever aware that the magic which an ancient Myrthian dagger can bring into a home is neither more or less than that which the presence of the right person at the right time can also ignite.

In the years since it was released to general indifference, **BLOOD COUPLE** has become one of the most retitled motion pictures in the brief history of home video. With the film disowned by Gunn, presumably ensnared in ownership limbo between Kelly-Jordan and Heritage Productions, and blindly reviled by the saviors of **GANJA & HESS**, this most orphaned of horror videos has been adopted by a different company virtually every year.

Its first video appearance was as **BLOOD COUPLE**, on the now-defunct Video Gems label in 1985. Though no longer active as a distributor, Video Gems licensed **BLOOD COUPLE** and other titles last year to the North Carolina-based United American Video Corporation, whose LP-speed copies can be found for sale between \$9.95 and \$14.95.

Other companies have released the film on tape under a variety of different (and rather offensive) titles, including Lettuce Entertain You's **BLACK EVIL**, Impulse Productions' **BLACK VAMPIRE** (the same company releases the Amicus film **THE BEAST MUST DIE** as **BLACK WEREWOLF**), and Fantasy Video's **BLACK OUT: THE MOMENT OF TERROR**. The packaging of these retitled releases tends to be equally tacky and fraudulent. The box designed for **BLACK OUT** sports a photograph of an African warrior that could easily have been clipped from an old back number of **NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC**. Its liner notes wrongfully promise a running time of 92m. **BLACK VAMPIRE**'s box painting features the prominent silhouette of a Lugosi-like figure, in a billowing cape with preposterously erect collar, straddling (God knows why) a railroad track! The alternate universe credits on the box read "Produced by Allan Kelly" and "Directed by Lawrence Jordan."

In an ironic twist of circumstance, the film has not yet been released on tape as **DOUBLE POSSESSION**, although this is the best-known of all its later titles among fans of the genre.



But what of **GANJA & HESS** and its survival?

As the original negative of **GANJA & HESS** was being submitted to Fima Noveck for re-editing, Gunn managed to obtain a single 35mm print of his

original cut and arranged for the safekeeping of his banished aristocrat child in the castle vaults of the Museum of Modern Art. Thus Gunn's film, desperate to survive, became a voluntary captive in an ebony tower of its own pretensions to art, an ironic parallel to the identity crisis of the film's withdrawn intellectual hero, Hess Green. Throughout the '70s, **GANJA & HESS** was screened several times for the public; it quickly became one of the most demanded titles in MOMA's permanent collection. In 1980, Gunn was one of 10 filmmakers invited to present his work at the Independent Black American Film Festival in Paris, and showed **GANJA** to a whole new generation of French admirers. By this time, however, **GANJA**'s popularity began to inflict serious damage on this only extant print. Footage became scratched and the print was stretched.

Pearl Bowser, one of the film's staunchest admirers, became aware of this deterioration and brought it to Gunn's attention. It was from him that she learned that the film's original negative had been cut and destroyed during the preparation of **BLOOD COUPLE**. Gunn arranged to have the print withdrawn from public access until sufficient funds could be collected to strike a new 16mm internegative. For many suspenseful months, this meant the virtual extinction of **GANJA & HESS**.

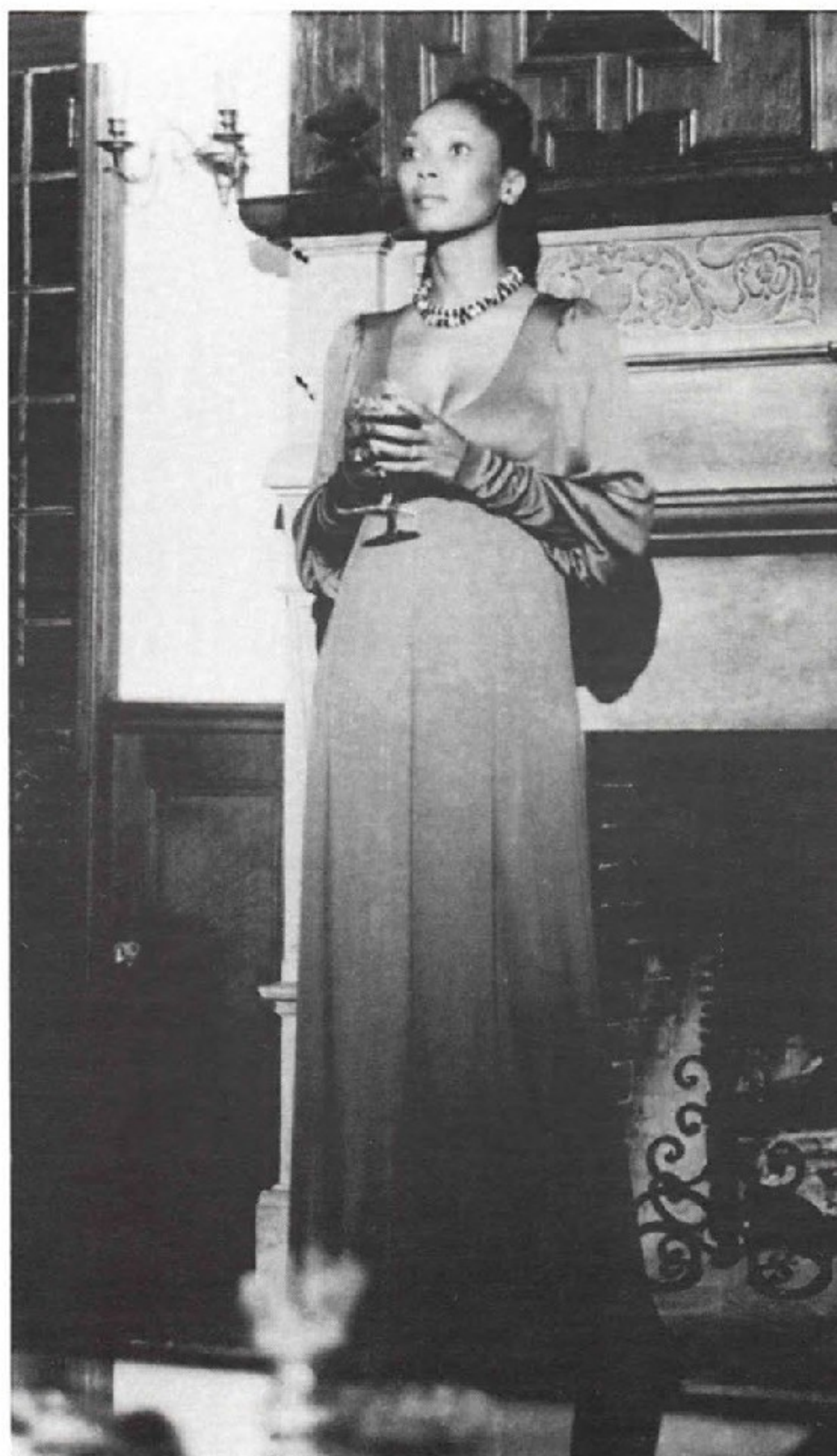
The film's ownership had drifted into legal ambiguity with its rejection by (and the later dissolution of) Kelly-Jordan Enterprises Inc., and no one seemed willing to pay the \$10,000 tab for restoring the most ambitious and lavishly praised Black film of its era. No one, that is, until Bowser went to Gunn with a fund-raising strategy, which involved sending the director and his film on the road, screening and discussing it at colleges, media centers, libraries and museums. In less than a year, the film's restoration costs were covered by pre-paid bookings arranged by Bowser, and Gunn was able to travel across the country with a brand new 16mm print under his arm.

Thankfully, MOMA has made **GANJA & HESS** available again for public screenings and, last summer, New York's Whitney Museum of American Art offered seven screenings of the film during a retrospective of Gunn's work. **STOP** was also featured, unshelved after a twenty year depository to receive its first **VARIETY** review, more than a year after its director's death.

Epilogue

After **GANJA & HESS**, Bill Gunn's greatest successes were the productions he wrote for the stage. His play **THE BLACK PICTURE SHOW**, produced by

Joseph Papp in 1975 and later published, was based on Gunn's bitter experiences in the movie world and received critical honors and two Audelco Black Theater Awards (Best Play, Best Director). Gunn's bad experiences in the film business didn't discourage him from seeking his place in it; he went on to write several screenplays, including uncredited work on Tom Gries' **THE GREATEST** (1977, which is explicitly detailed in the confessional novel **RHINESTONE SHARECROPPING**). In 1980-81, Gunn directed **PERSONAL PROBLEMS VOLUMES 1 & 2**, a four-hour pair of videotaped experimental soap operas conceived by his friend and publisher, the novelist Ishmael Reed. His final work as a director was 1982's **THE ALBERTA HUNTER STORY 1900-1950**, a five-hour biography of the American blues singer produced for the BBC. The same year, he acted in a few films, most notably a large role in Kathleen Collins' well-received **LOSING GROUND** (1982, which reunited Gunn with Duane Jones) and a recurring stint on NBC-TV's **THE COSBY SHOW** as one of Cliff Huxtable's kitchen-table poker partners.



But it was the New York stage that most occupied Bill Gunn's attentions in the mid-to-late '80s. The theater's gain was the cinema's loss. What makes **GANJA & HESS** so sorcerous—its literate dialogue, its poetic monologues, its tendency toward tableau stagings, the way its camera is free to be distracted from its characters by what's happening *over there* in *that* field or in *that* painting—are the signatures of a man whose literary and theatrical background was capable of informing his films without making them seem at all "literary" or "theatrical." Had Gunn been able to fund the various projects he wrote during the sixteen years following **GANJA & HESS**, and turn them into films, who knows where the American cinema would be today?

To quote again from Gunn's obituary in *THE VILLAGE VOICE*, "Imagine a world where Miles Davis was disallowed from recording after *KIND OF BLUE* or where Toni Morrison was only known as the author of *THE BLUEST EYE*. I don't think, *I know*, that if Gunn had been making a film a year after **GANJA & HESS** our cinema would have been transformed as Miles and Morrison have transformed our music and literature."¹³

In this statement, Greg Tate seems to be using "our" more racially than generally. While what he says is probably true, it also constricts the human amplitude of Gunn's achievement and gestures toward an obstacle which Gunn never managed, for all his blows, to fell. Gunn once said, "There is something about my Blackness that I don't understand, and that takes a major part of my time."¹⁴ He had too much to say, and too little time to say it, to waste his energies on the obvious. This isn't to say that he didn't keep coming up against it. The elegance of Gunn's work is that it is both colorful and colorless; it is about individuals, first and foremost, and about the Black experience mainly in the degree to which its characters are continually summoned by contact with White society back to the obligations of race. Called continually back, Bill Gunn looked ahead.

It should be obvious that **GANJA & HESS** has too much to offer to remain stuck in cultural exclusivity at Black film festivals and in museum exhibitions. It richly deserves a commercial release on videocassette, and to find the cult audience which awaits any film of great imagination and equal ambition. It is our joint hope that this article will help to bring about negotiations toward this end, and that many more people can soon be exposed to the generous spirit of Bill Gunn. This spirit inhabits his works today as much as it ever did, so these will persist and survive and keep his name in memory.

With or without our society's sanctions.

NOTES

- ¹ The onscreen title makes use of an ampersand ("&"), not the word "AND" as most articles about the film have maintained.
- ² Tate, Greg; *VILLAGE VOICE*, April 25, 1989, p. 98.
- ³ Monaco, James; *AMERICAN FILM NOW* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979).
- ⁴ Monaco, *ibid.*
- ⁵ Sources like Michael Weldon's *THE PSYCHOTRONIC ENCYCLOPEDIA OF FILM* and Phil Hardy's *ENCYCLOPEDIA OF HORROR MOVIES* credit Marlene Clark with appearing in "several" Russ Meyer films, but this statement appears to be unsubstantiated and insupportable. According to David K. Frasier's *RUSS MEYER: THE LIFE AND TIMES*, an indispensable and all-embracing biobibliography of the filmmaker (\$39.95, McFarland & Company, Box 611, Jefferson NC 28640), only two Black actresses have starred in Meyer's work: Lavelle Robie in *FINDERS KEEPERS, LOVERS WEEPERS* (1967) and Marcia McBroom in *BEYOND THE VALLEY OF THE DOLLS* (1970); neither is a pseudonym for Clark. Incidentally, Clark also briefly appeared in the Gunn-scripted *THE LANDLORD* (1970), which may have been her earliest screen appearance.
- ⁶ Unfortunately, Jones died at age 51 on July 22, 1988, having spoken only once to the press about his brief but fortunate career in fantastic films. The result, Tim Ferrante's heartfelt "A Farewell to Duane Jones," appeared in *FANGORIA* #80 (February 1989), pps. 14-18, 64.
- ⁷ Tate, *ibid.*
- ⁸ Kelly-Jordan survived long enough to produce and distribute one other film, *HONEYBABY*, *HONEYBABY* (1974), an international thriller directed by Michael Schultz, which has likewise sidled into obscurity. It was Diana Sands' last film, released posthumously.
- ⁹ In *RHINESTONE SHARECROPPING*, Gunn makes the following confession, pertinent to the (somewhat unrealistically) comfortable trappings of this scholar's lifestyle: "When I was a child, my father taught me to believe that in a prior life I had lived in a palace." (p. 42) These words not only establish Gunn's personal identification with

This rare still affords a glimpse of the bloody demise of Archie (Leonard Jackson), a scene found in neither GANJA & HESS or BLOOD COUPLE!



Hess, but also identify the film as a fabulist description of how the past (in this case, racial memory) can inform or complicate one's illusory present.

¹⁰ **BC** scores this scene with a reprise of Waymon's Myrthian spiritual.

¹¹ The "Bungelii Work Song" is first heard in **G&H** at the close of Hess' dinner with George Meda, when he says "I don't know what hunger is." During the Work Song's second hearing at the lawn party, the recording is played (tainted?) with the electronic distortion heard over "March Blues" when Meda shoots himself and bleeds onto the floor. The combining here of these two soundtracks conveys, for the first time in the film, the subliminal message "hunger/blood." The two recordings remain inseparable for the remainder of the film.

¹² It should be noted here that this is Archie's last-positioned appearance in either version of the picture. Though his sudden and unexplained disappearance coincides with the marriage of Ganja and Hess, it is unlikely (considering Ganja's haughty demeanor) that he would have been dismissed from his duties. Curiously, a still in the **DOUBLE POSSESSION** set shows Archie (Leonard Jackson) lying dead on the grassy grounds of Hess' estate, his glasses knocked off. Gunn and Noveck may have agreed, while assembling their successive cuts, that audiences wouldn't cotton to

such a likeable character being killed, but the oversight of a suitable farewell or exit for Archie is a grave flaw in both versions of the film.

¹³ Tate, *ibid.*

¹⁴ Monaco, *ibid.*

AVAILABILITY

GANJA & HESS — 1973, 112m 47s — Distributed on 16mm and Videocassette by Third World Newsreel, 335 W. 38th Street, NYC, NY 10018 (212/947-9277), and by African Diaspora Images, PO Box 3517, Brooklyn, NY 11202 (718/852-8353).

BLOOD COUPLE — (aka **DOUBLE POSSESSION**) — 1975, 79m 19s — Video Gems (OP), United American (\$14.95)

BLACK EVIL — Lettuce Entertain You, \$39.95, OP

BLACK OUT: THE MOMENT OF TERROR — Distinctive Movie Network/Fantasy Video, \$59.95, OP

BLACK VAMPIRE — Impulse Productions, \$59.95, OP



Biblio Watchdog

ALFRED HITCHCOCK AND THE MAKING OF PSYCHO

Stephen Rebello

Dembner Books (W.W. Norton), 224 pages, \$24.95

Reviewed by Stephen R. Bissette



Showering Praises

“MAKING OF” BOOKS, especially those about fantastic films, are usually dedicated to forthcoming releases, and more often than not turn out to be fatuous, overblown affairs. If anyone *does* care about “The Making of” *BATTLESTAR GALACTICA*, *SUPERMAN: THE MOVIE*, or Dino’s *KING KONG*, the tomes that chronicle their productions are nothing more than softcover press releases, thin achievements swollen to book-length with self-serving misinformation and gross distortions. Historical texts focusing on truly relevant genre films are all too rare, those of significant depth being typically relegated to the pages of journals like *CINEFANTASTIQUE* or the late-lamented *PHOTON*, in whose pages these important histories are bagged, boxed and filed away by caring collectors, and thereby denied the space they deserve on bookshelves otherwise glutted with merchandising dross marauding as research.

In this sense, Stephen Rebello’s remarkable chronology of Alfred Hitchcock’s seminal classic *PSYCHO* (1960) is doubly welcome. The book provides a definitive overview of the film’s troubled production and phenomenal success, and it also rescues Rebello’s admirable efforts from collector’s limbo (an earlier, abbreviated draft was published as a handsomely illustrated *CFQ* double-issue cover story: October 1986, Vol. 16, No. 4/5).

While there were many precedents to key elements in Robert Bloch’s novel and Hitchcock’s audacious film adaptation, *PSYCHO* was a ground-breaker in 1960, bursting mainstream cinema taboos; looking back, it represents the threshold of the modern horror film. A great deal of critical analysis has been dedicated to *PSYCHO*, along with an equal measure of myth and misinformation. There are many worthwhile books about Hitchcock’s career, all of which discuss the film at length; Donald Spoto’s *THE ART*

OF ALFRED HITCHCOCK (Dolphin/Doubleday, 1976) offers complete essays on each of the films, and was the only such exegesis endorsed by Hitchcock himself; the same author's *THE DARK SIDE OF GENIUS: THE LIFE OF ALFRED HITCHCOCK* (Little, Brown & Co., 1983) is also of particular interest given *PSYCHO*'s misogynistic undercurrents and, here, Rebello's insight into the director's spiteful treatment of actress Vera Miles (see pgs. 62-65). Richard Anobile's out-of-print "Film Classics Library" volume on *PSYCHO* (Flame/Avon Books, 1974) offered a compelling, scene-by-scene document of the film itself: a once-vital *fumetti* format, now redundant in an era when videocassettes of the film itself can be easily owned or rented. *PSYCHO* may be the most written-about of all horror films, but a singular, all-inclusive study of the film itself—its creation, execution, release and cultural impact—has been long overdue.

Stephen Rebello has nearly served up just the book. Here is the in-depth story of how Hitchcock bucked studio disdain and the censor's wrath to produce an undisputed classic in record time. The speed with which the production was mounted is still astonishing: Robert Bloch's novel was published April, 1959; the first screenwriter (James P. Cavanaugh) was hired in June, fired in July; Joseph Stefano's services were engaged in September; test footage was shot November 11; principal photography was begun November 30 and wrapped February 1, 1960; a rough cut was screened April 26; and the censors granted their approval in May, making possible its New York City premiere on June 16, 1960! Amid this whirlwind of activity, movie history was made, and Rebello has clearly done his homework well, casting a wide net and detailing nearly every facet of the film's creation through an impressive and lively array of research, interviews and overviews. No conjecture here: where memories falter or fail, Rebello's intensive research bridges the gaps

and answers questions with refreshing clarity and skill. And, most importantly, where Rebello is *unable* to unearth documented information, he tells us so, or leaves well enough alone.

A perfect case in point is Rebello's probing of the assertion that Saul Bass storyboarded (and thus directed) the famous shower murder of Marion Crane. Rebello details the preparation and filming of the sequence itself, then introduces the startling claim of directorship which Bass first made publicly while promoting his directorial debut *PHASE IV* (1973), and allows for the momentum which Bass' allegations have gained since Hitchcock's death. Rebello carefully lets those who were involved with the filming of the sequence itself settle the issue for posterity—script supervisor Marshal Schlom, wardrobe supervisor Rita Riggs, assistant director Hilton Green, makeup man Jack Barron, stuntwoman Margo Epper and 'body double' Marli Renfro are significantly quoted, along with star Janet Leigh, writer Joseph Stefano, and attendant opinions are offered by such non-participants as Anthony Perkins and Robert Bloch. Where a less-rigorous journalist would have been satisfied with the 'name' quotes, or jumped into the fray with his own two cents' worth, Rebello wisely shuts up and digs deeper. Not surprisingly, the words of those directly involved carry the greatest weight, and the verdict clearly rules in Hitchcock's favor.

Rebello's lapses are few, but must be noted. In light of the rest of the book, which flows beautifully and is rich in detail and documentation, the first chapter's coverage of Ed Gein's crimes, the ghoulish and tragic inspiration for Bloch's novel, is serviceable but sketchy.¹ The second chapter, which offers background on Bloch himself and the writing of the novel, is just as abbreviated but much more satisfying, thanks to the dramatic story of its blind sale for peanuts to an *unidentified* producer.²

The most glaring factual discrepancy seems due

¹ For a proper study of Ed Gein's life and crimes, we recommend David Schreiner's illustrated article in *WEIRD TRIPS MAGAZINE* #2 (Kitchen Sink Press, 1978); *EDWARD GEIN* by Judge Robert H. Gollmar (1981, currently in paperback from Pinnacle Books); and *DEVIANT: THE SHOCKING TRUE STORY OF THE ORIGINAL 'PSYCHO'* by Harold Schechter (Pocket Books, 1989—still in print). Schechter's is the definitive work, framing its study with the cultural impact (via *PSYCHO* and Tobe Hooper's *THE TEXAS CHAINSAW MASSACRE*, 1974) of Gein's crimes. However, Judge Gollmar—who presided over Gein's original (and later parole) trial—offers a unique first-hand account, including a selection of truly horrific photos of Gein's home and final victim. A filmed documentary, *ED GEIN—THE AMERICAN MANIAC*, is available from Import Horror Video.

² Rebello fails to note that Bloch has cited his short story "The Real Bad Friend" as an influence upon his novel, and hence the film. The story is currently included in David Wheeler's anthology *NO, BUT I SAW THE MOVIE: THE BEST SHORT STORIES EVER MADE INTO FILM* (Penguin, 1989).

to a typo: Rebello notes that Joseph Stefano "completed a first draft screenplay in three weeks and turned it in on December 19, 1959" (pgs. 43-44), while "the writer delivered a slightly-revised second draft dated November 2, 1959," with further adjustments "turned in on November 10, November 13 and December 1" (p. 47)—quite a feat, even for a Speedy Gonzales like Stefano. Rebello pumps us with so much information that attentive readers can sort out the matter themselves, through the typo is regrettable. Given that Stefano was hired in mid-September (p. 40), worked with Hitchcock for "five weeks of daily story conferences" (pgs. 40-41), that artist Saul Bass received script pages for storyboarding between November 10-29 (p. 57), and that principal photography began November 30 (p. 80), Stefano's first draft must have been submitted October 19, 1959.

Rebello's analysis of why Hitchcock chose to film **PSYCHO** reveals the decisive influence of Henri-Georges Clouzot's **DIABOLIQUE** (*Les Diaboliques*, 1955) and the horror revival of the late '50s, confirming Hitchcock's conscious embrace and calculated reinvention of the genre at this crucial point in his career. While this information is important and even revelatory, Rebello fails to analyze any of **PSYCHO**'s other predecessors, stylistic and generic. No mention is made of the axe murder in Dimitri Kirsanov's French film *Menilmontant* (1924), or the steambath stabbing in Welles' **OTHELLO** (1952), both of which were shot and edited with a rhythmic precision and impact that anticipates **PSYCHO**; the ominous shower sequence in the Val Lewton production of Mark Robinson's **THE SEVENTH VICTIM** (1943), with the Satanist silhouetted against the stall's curtain as she delivers a warning to the vulnerable female protagonist; Janet Leigh terrorized (raped?) by androgynous gang members in a Bates-like motel in Orson Welles' **TOUCH OF EVIL** (1958); the thematic and plot similarities with inimitable contemporaries like Gerd Oswald's **SCREAMING MIMI** (1958) and especially John Moxey's **HORROR HOTEL** (1960), wherein the nominal 'heroine' is also murdered 1/3 of the way into the story, pulling the rug out from under the audience's feet and triggering an identical narrative structure. William Castle's extremely pertinent **HOMICIDAL** (1961) is mentioned only ironically, in terms of *TIME MAGAZINE*'s preference for this inspired imitation over Hitchcock's original; Rebello doesn't explicitly connect this disappointment to Hitchcock's later punishing refusal to hire Bloch ("Too many films for William Castle"), nor does he elucidate this antagonism by delineating the numerous similarities between the two films.

Most significantly, the relevance and attendant ironies of Michael Powell's **PEEPING TOM** (1959/60) are not discussed, nor is the film even mentioned. **PEEPING TOM** was a contemporary production which also dealt with voyeurism, parent-induced psychosexual derangement, and shocking murder while asking its audience to identify with its handsome young murderer/"hero". The irony is that **PEEPING TOM** demolished the career of its prestigious British director, while **PSYCHO** catapulted its prestigious British director into his greatest success; neither director would ever top, or evade the shadow of their respective horror masterpieces. These may be tentative threads, but they are important and rarely brought to light anywhere; one looks to a book such as Rebello's to make these connections, but he chooses not to, as if too many arcane facts and titles might disenchant Main Street readers.

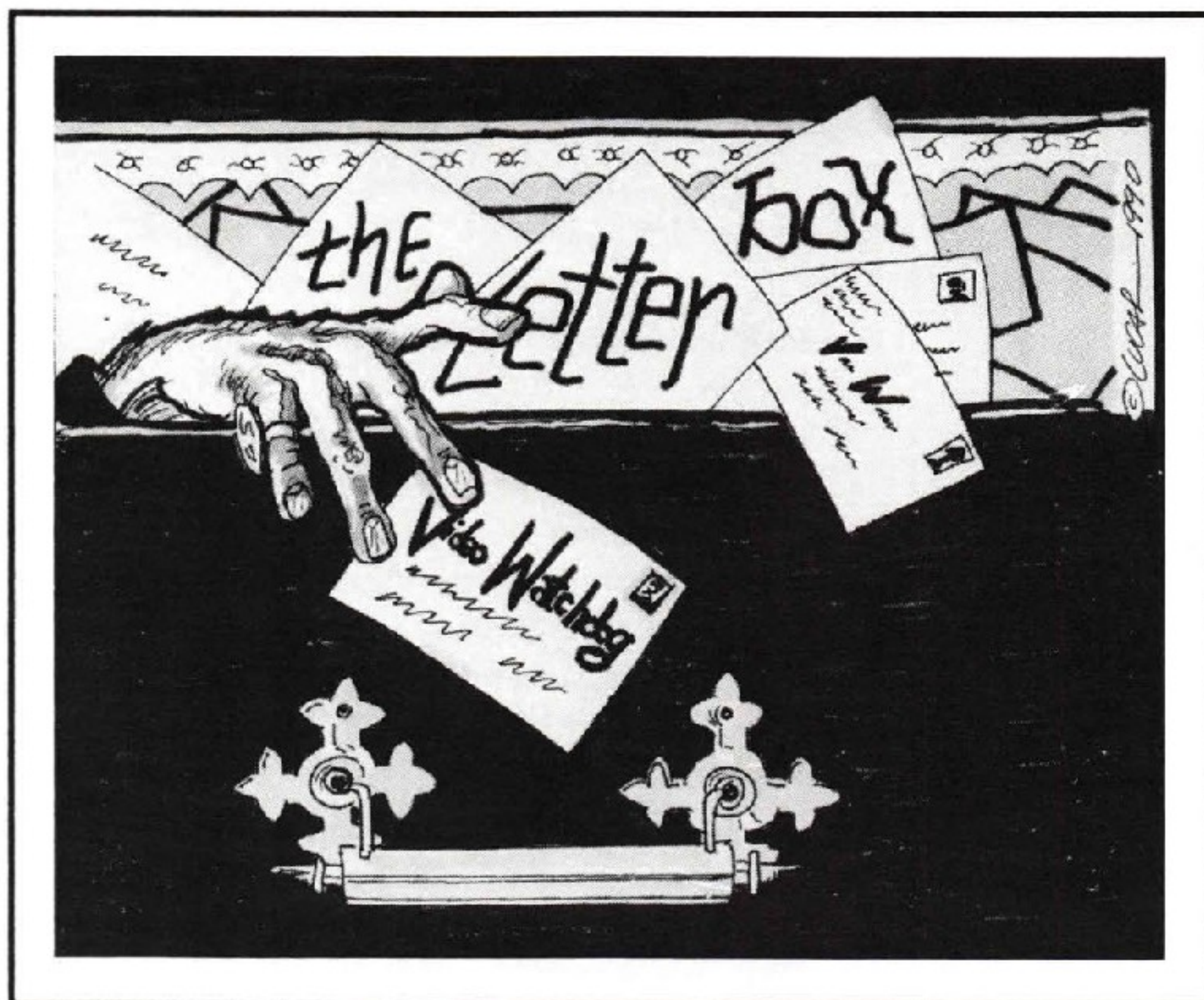
Though one may bemoan the missed opportunities, Steve Rebello's title is, after all, **ALFRED HITCHCOCK AND THE MAKING OF PSYCHO**, which accurately sums up his scope and intent. From its opening chapters to the final appendices, Rebello rigorously analyses **PSYCHO** in terms of Hitchcock's *oeuvre*. While doing so, the context of the filmmaking industry Hitchcock was working within—and struggling against—is illuminated, but the vital *cultural* context is ignored. This is indicative of the book's most grievous weakness: in its intensive, single-minded study of **PSYCHO**'s production and all of its fascinating minutiae, relevant contextual information is too often excused or glibly summarized.

Note the final chapter, "Afterglow and Aftermath," which tries to provide just such a cultural context in writing about the wake of **PSYCHO**'s first release. Here, Rebello touches all the bases, but with such superficial brevity that he fails to adequately address the impact of Hitchcock's achievement on the genre and, more importantly, its status as an art form.

Other quibbles with the book—such as its stingy assortment of overfamiliar illustrations, a common drawback among the current crop of serious cinema studies—are minor. While it's sad to note Rebello's failure to properly scrutinize the considerable shock wave that rippled out of Hitchcock's nasty little monochromatic mongrel production, there is no denying the otherwise impressive reach of his research.

ALFRED HITCHCOCK AND THE MAKING OF PSYCHO is a concise, readable, and fairly exhaustive work, an effort to be owned, applauded, and savored. Count this as a must for every Watchdog's bookshelf.





As this issue goes to press, we're still getting mail from our debut issue and the response to our best-selling TWIN PEAKS issue is just beginning to herniate our poor postman. We'll delve into those arrivals in next issue's "Letterbox."

Donna and I really appreciate all the letters we receive and would like to take this opportunity to thank you for your comments, tips and suggestions. Our bimonthly schedule (and my basic disorganization) makes it impossible to respond to everyone, but if a personal reply is essential, include a stamp or a Self Addressed Stamped Envelope to goad me. Guilt gets it done.

And remember—don't just read VIDEO WATCHDOG—become one! News tips and letters we use are quickly remunerated with an enviable, limited edition "VIDEO WATCHDOG Informant" button!

—T.L.

RAMSEY CAMPBELL WRITES

VIDEO WATCHDOG is a delight. You should be proud of it.

It's also the kind of magazine that prompts me to rack my brain for obscure facts, so here goes. The Bingo print of **THE CAT O'NINE TAILS** sounds very much like the print released theatrically in Britain as a second feature in the early 1970's. Several years ago, the BBC broadcast an uncensored print—alas, never repeated. (Incidentally, the murder of Bianca Merussi seems uncannily, or perhaps cannily, similar to Hitchcock's description of the kind of detail he would like to have included in a strangulation sequence.) You may know that earlier in the year the BBC also broadcast Bava's original cuts of **LISA AND THE DEVIL** and **THE MASK OF SATAN (BLACK SUNDAY)** in English, introduced by Kim Newman.

Even more esoteric, the first theatrical showing of **THE EVIL DEAD** in Liverpool—some months after the video release—was, to my astonishment, was of the original uncut version. The British censor's certificate in front of the copy (which had been supplied at short notice by the distributor after the copy they first sent had proved unshowable) carried an X rather than an 18 certificate. I might have dreamed all this, except that colleagues at the press show (including John Thompson, who lectures in film at Liverpool University) also saw the copy, which continued to be shown on the first Liverpool run of the film. I never pressed for an explanation, in case my attempts robbed audiences of a rare chance to see this print in Britain.

Yours for scholarship!

Ramsey Campbell
Merseyside, England

HEY, LORIMAR— SURRENDER THE PINK

Does any company offer Roger Corman's **LAST WOMAN ON EARTH** in color? (Sinister Cinema's print is B&W.) Also, I recently found an old Allied Artists Home Video copy of Michael Reeves' **THE SORCERERS**, which hacked out all the violence. Any chance of a re-release on a new video label?

Kevin Schmidt
Succasunna, NJ

*Interesting story: When the time came for **LAST WOMAN ON EARTH** and many other Filmgroup titles (like **BEAST FROM HAUNTED CAVE**) to be sold to TV, they were all too short, so Corman hired Monte Hellman to film additional footage for them on-the-cheap, meaning "in B&W." This meant that the odd expanded color release became B&W to match its inserts. These 16mm versions, not the 35mm originals, have prevailed. (If anyone out there knows precisely what Hellman added to which films, let the Watchdog know!) Judging from Sinister's **SHE GODS OF SHARK REEF**, even color prints of this stuff would be in B&W (& pink) by now. Cinemacabre Video's "Color Horror and Science Fiction Trailers Volume 1" (\$21.95 ppd. from P.O. Box 10005, Baltimore, MD 21285-0005) includes a nifty color **LAST WOMAN ON EARTH** trailer. And, cut or not, that **SORCERERS** video you found is extremely rare (I'd never heard of it!) and probably worth something to the right collector. No re-release of **THE SORCERERS** has been announced, nor an official release for any of Allied's Filmgroup titles, but Warner Brothers now seems to own Lorimar (which acquired Allied Artists),*

and stranger things have happened. NC 17, to name one.

THERE'S NO K IN CANADA

Nova Home Video of Calgary, Alberta has purchased the rights to Lucio Fulci's **DANGEROUS OBSESSION** (aka **THE DEVIL'S HONEY**) for distribution in Canada. Basically, they have used AIP's box, sticking their own logo over AIP's address on the back.

However, after comparing the film against the cuts listed in your mag ("Watchdog News," VW #1), I've come to the conclusion that the Nova version is longer than the one released in the States by AIP. Included in the Nova version is the erotic saxophone scene, including all closeups of Jessica grinding her pubis against the bell of the sax. The entire sax scene runs well over 1m 30s. Also included is the masturbation scene, which not only includes two shots of pronounced movement but four or five (though two are more pronounced than the others).

One other note, on a different subject. In your Franco videography, you've listed CIC's **THE WOMEN OF CELLBLOCK 9** as a censored version. CIC does indeed distribute a cut version (which runs a mere 56m!); however, they also offer an uncut version, running 73m. The difference is first found on the box itself. The cut version is titled **THE WOMEN OF CELLBLOC 9**, while the complete version includes the **K** in **BLOCK**. I also believe there is an uncut version of **HELLHOLE WOMEN** on CIC, although it has been released only in Quebec.

Kevin Sczepanski
Scarborough, Ontario
Canada

TAKE THE FRANCO CHALLENGE

After reading your extensive Jess Franco article and videography, I noticed some alternate versions which were not listed and may be of some help to you.

The French video release of **Les Amazones De La Luxure** also contains Dutch subtitles, while the onscreen title is **Yuka** as well, which is similar to the French-Canadian release.

The two Italian releases **II Conte Dracula** and **La Dea Cannibale** are on GB Video and Video Atlantis, respectively.

As for **ISLAND WOMEN**, I believe it is the work of Erwin C. Dietrich, not Jess Franco. There are a number of facts pointing it in that direction. 1) Comedic music is played over the jailhouse sex scenes, virtually a signature trait in Dietrich's numerous sex comedies; 2) Many of the actors in **ISLAND WOMEN** are in other Dietrich films, such as Erik Falk in **SIX SWEDISH GIRLS AT THE GAS PUMP** and **MAD FOXES**, Brigitte Lahaie in **SIX SWEDISH GIRLS** and **THE AMOROUS SISTERS**, and Karine Gambier, who joined both Falk and Lahaie in **COME PLAY WITH ME PART 2**. 3) There's rarely any foreplay in Dietrich's films, they just go straight to it, as we see in **ISLAND WOMEN**. 4) Finally, the lobby of the bordello in **ISLAND WOMEN** is the same set used in **SIX SWEDISH GIRLS**.

Dennis Capicik
Toronto, Ontario
Canada

*In an interview recently published in the German filmzine **SPLATTING IMAGE** (#4, Graf Haufen, Zossener Str.20, 1000 Berlin 61 Germany), cinematographer Peter Baumgartner reveals that Jess Franco was not the director of **ISLAND WOMEN***

[*Gefangene Frauen*, 1980], as Dennis observes.

FAX TO THE MAX

I've just read Craig Ledbetter's interesting article in VW #1 and have some additional information for you.

D'Amato's **PRISON DANCER** has been released here in Italy, but is very rare and hard to find. **TRHAUHMA** has been released here as *Trhauma*; it is a 1980 Italian film directed by Gianni Martucci (probably Joe Martucci of **THE RED MONKS** fame). It is a Joint Working Group/Alberto Barras production, and was written by Martucci, Gaetano Russo, and Allesandro Caponi (the director of **WITCH STORY!**). It stars Gaetano Russo, Domitilla Cavazza, and Francesco Diogene. Franco's **AIDS: THE PLAGUE OF HUMANITY**, I think, has also been released here as *SIDA: La Peste del 20 Secolo*, and also as *SIDA: Il Pericolo strisciante*.

About the Franco Videography:

The US version of **GRETA THE MAD BUTCHER** is cut. Some lesbian sex scenes, contained in the version aired several times on Italian private channels, are missing.

The correct Italian title for **BLOODY MOON** is *Profonde Tenebre* (I don't know why you Americans keep spelling "Tenebre" as "Tenebrae"...). It's on the Avofilm label.

DRACULA CONTRA FRANKENSTEIN has also been released in Germany, letterboxed and (I think) uncut.

A VIRGIN AMONG THE LIVING DEAD is available here from DB Media, and has been re-released for newspaper shops, under the title *Una Vergine tra gli Zomble*. Included with the tape is a poster with a big Franco picture!

By the way, *Inferno in di-*

retta doesn't translate as "Straight to Hell" but as "Hell, Live." Very different, eh?

Max Della Mora
GOREZILLA
Rome, Italy

THE SHRINKING MAN & THE GREAT ONE

I'm on my second copy of MCA's **THE INCREDIBLE SHRINKING MAN** (I lost my first copy in a flood), and I'd swear there's a very brief cut. It lasts maybe 2-3s, when Scott Carey kills the spider from beneath with the sewing needle and its blood drips onto him. I noticed this shot missing in both copies I've owned—WHY? Since I first saw this classic in the early '70s, TV has always shown it...

Though it isn't necessarily the kind of film you cover, one of my favorite movies is Key Video's **SOLDIER IN THE RAIN** (1963). For whatever reason, [Key] cut out a 1-2m scene of Jackie Gleason helping Steve McQueen during a brawl in a mess hall by holding back a punch thrown by Lew Gallo. Again, I ask—WHY? Thankfully, the barroom brawl at the end was left intact.

Frank Liquoir
Leonia, NJ

*The Watchdog checked MCA's **SHRINKING MAN** against an old broadcast copy. What you're seeing, Frank, is video restoration in action. When Scott Carey (Grant Williams) twists the needle into the spider, MCA's image freezes for a split-second, but that's not a cut; it's a technique by which missing or damaged frames can be deleted from an image track without imposing a splice on the soundtrack.*

WHY DO YOU THINK THEY CALL IT MARIMBA?

Though well-researched and fun to read, Steve Bissette's coverage of **CUT AND RUN** (VW #1) missed the most interesting aspect... namely, that it was based on a screenplay by Wes Craven! In the early '80s, Craven (hot off **THE HILLS HAVE EYES** and hungry for work) was listed in the International section of **VARIETY** as being the writer/director of a drug trafficking action/adventure film for Racing Pictures (which produced **C&R**) entitled **MARIMBA** (a Spanish slang expression for dope). The film was listed as being "in production" for several weeks but, obviously, it never came out.

At a FANGORIA Convention out here in '85, I asked Craven about **MARIMBA**. He seemed surprised that anyone knew about it, and said that it was a production he was involved with; he had written a script concerning newspeople investigating a drug-smuggling ring in South America, but had some sort of falling-out with the Italian producers and left the project. Eventually, he said, they hired an Italian director, reworked the script somewhat, and shot it under the title **CUT AND RUN!** I believe he said he'd seen the film and did not like it. He definitely said that he tried to get his original script back from the producers, telling them, "You've had your shot at it and blew it, now let me make my version." To no one's surprise, they refused.

I asked Craven point-blank if he'd shot any footage for the film, and he said No. However, the lengthy pre-production and in-production status of the film (as reported in **VARIETY**) implies the opposite. Certainly the strongly American cast—and the presence of Craven favorite Michael Berryman—suggest that Craven was

heavily involved in pre-production, right up to and through the casting. Maybe Craven *did* shoot some of **C&R** before being dismissed? Perhaps the "falling-out" was that his sequences weren't juicy enough for the Italians' tastes; that could explain the two dramatically different versions of the Florida apartment sequence. Maybe Deodato was simply brought aboard to spice-up certain scenes, then stayed aboard to shoot (and sign) the rest of the film?

Who knows? After **A NIGHTMARE ON ELM STREET**, Craven's not about to go around admitting that he was once canned off a low-budget Italian thriller. It would be an interesting subject to broach with Lisa Blount, Willie Aames, Richard Lynch, or Michael Berryman, though...

Steve Jarvis
Woodland Hills, CA

QUOTH THE CRAVEN

I have some information to add to the continuing saga of **THE LAST HOUSE ON THE LEFT**. For once the news is mostly good. The CIC version of **LAST HOUSE** is more complete than the Vestron abortion. It clocks-in at 84m 7s.

Before I go into detail, I must refer back to your "Video Watch-dog" column in **GOREZONE #11**, which featured a letter from Francis Brewster, who listed all of the omissions in the Vestron video after comparing it to the UK video release. In an interesting coincidence, all eight of the omissions he cited are in the CIC (with one small change from his notes).

The first 2m 15s of the CIC video are letterboxed; this takes us a few seconds past the opening credits. At the point when the screen ration switches to conventional (1.33:1) framing, it appears we have also switched to a differ-

ent print, as the color and image quality show a slight decrease in quality (also, the sound is slightly out of sync for the next minute). Even with the drop in resolution, the CIC tape seems preferable to the Vestron in terms of print, color and contrast.

The following is the list of differences supplied by Francis Brewster; my comments, if any, follow in parentheses.

- Shot of Mari's hands after Weasel cuts her. (You can hear Mari exclaim, "Phyllis, he cut me!")

- Shot of Phyllis' jeans darkening as she is forced to urinate. (The shot lasts 2-3s longer in CIC's version. In its place, Vestron substitutes a brief reaction shot of Sadie; the audio track is identical on the two tapes.)

- Junior saying "If you're not careful, you're gonna kill somebody... make 'em make it with each other, man! Make 'em!" followed by Sadie adding, "That's a good idea!"

- Shot of Mari and Phyllis, nude, holding each other. (On the CIC, this shot lasts 12s longer; Vestron bridges the gap with a reaction shot insert of Junior.)

- Weasel chasing Phyllis over the embankment. (This shot lasts 20s.)

- A policeman is getting out of his car. (It's actually *two* policemen — a minor quibble, I know.)

- The policeman walking down the road. (Both policemen again. This shot isn't missing; it appears in a different spot on Vestron. CIC places it before Krug cuts his name on Mari's chest. On Vestron, it appears as a bridge between that scene and the one in

which Krug rapes Mari.)

- Five pieces of adult dialogue just prior to Mrs. Collingwood's revenge on Weasel.

With the exception of the opening titles, CIC's tape features no credits or intertitles, which leads me to believe that it was struck from a textless print prepared for the foreign market. The lack of titles results in two bizarre bits. 19m into the Vestron, an intertitle reading "Early Next Morning" appears. This omission isn't too jarring, since it's *obviously* the next morning — especially with that rooster crying on the soundtrack! The end credits sequence in which each actor is shown in a still-frame seems pretty odd without their names appearing. The screen then goes blank in the CIC version until the end credit song has finished.

You might also be interested to know that I saw **HELLHOLE WOMEN** stocked up here in an Amazing Video Machine. Who would have thought that Jess Franco would ever invade the Top 40 mentality that stocks these machines?

John Charles
Guelph, Ontario
Canada

FESTERING BRAINSORE WE'RE NOT

It's extraordinary to me that my obsession for finding the most complete versions of "fantastic videos" now rates a classy magazine — especially one I can read in public without embarrassing my wife.

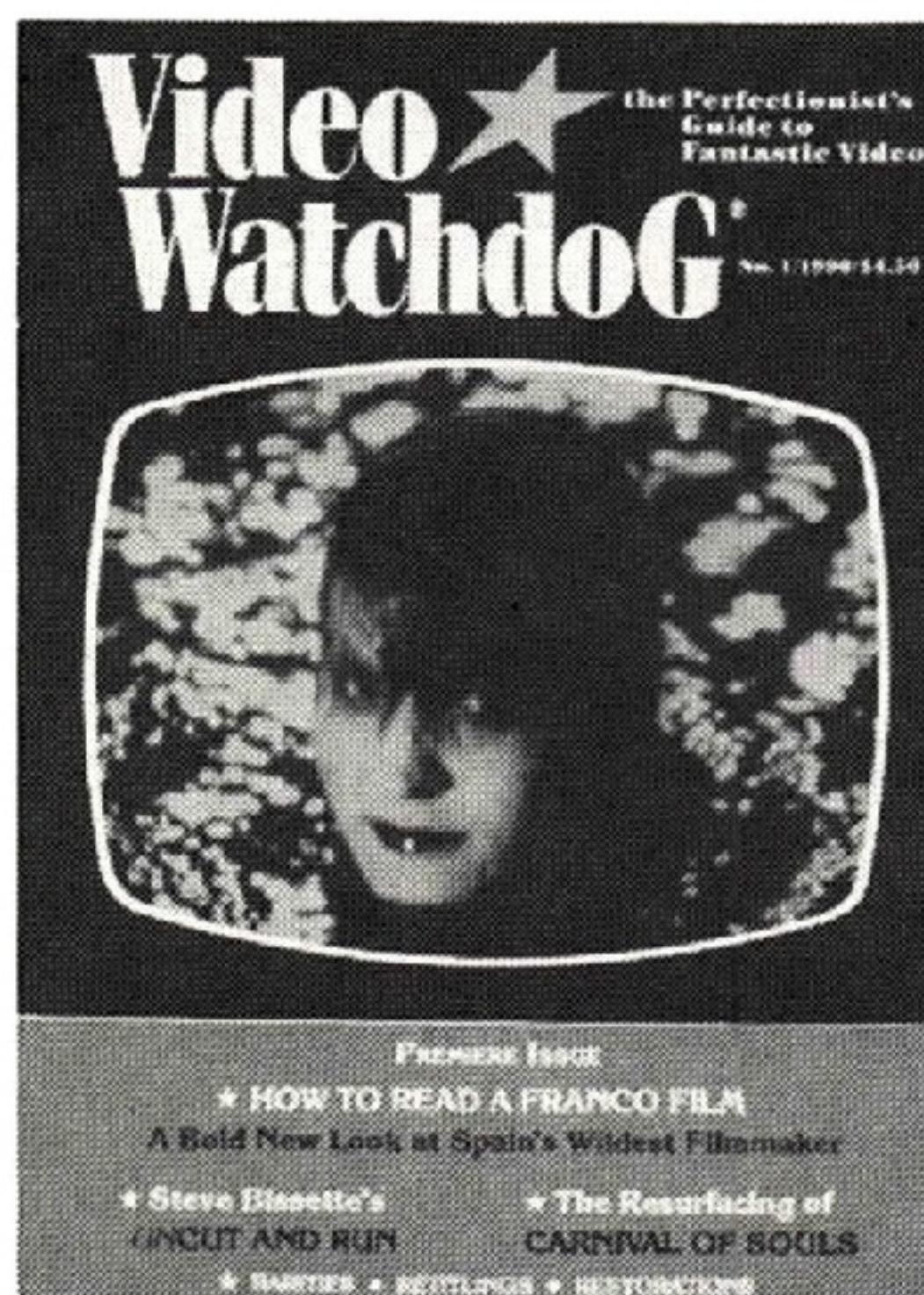
Matt Weisman
Beverly Hills, CA

Gee, Matt, maybe it has something to do with the fact that MY wife designs it!



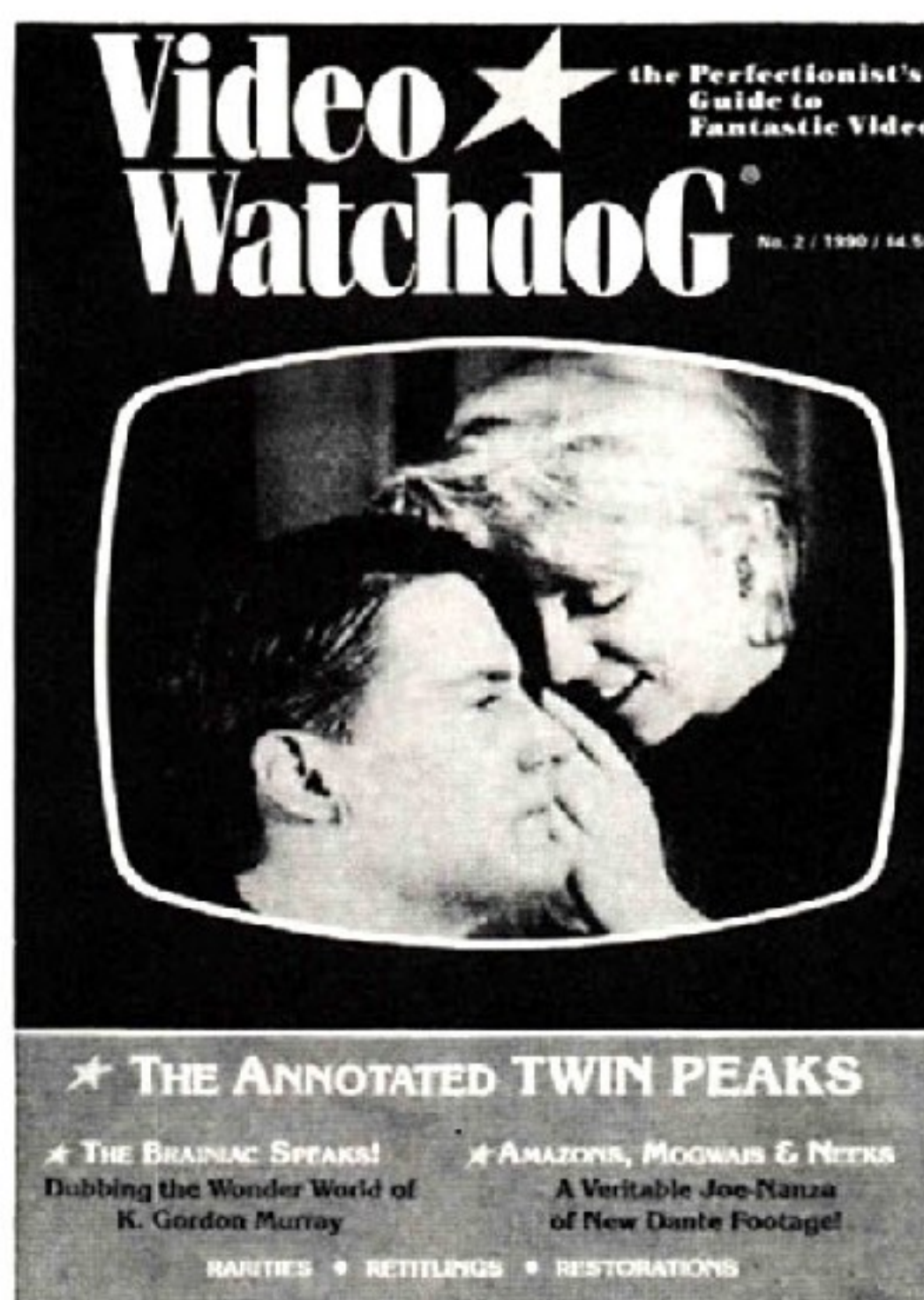
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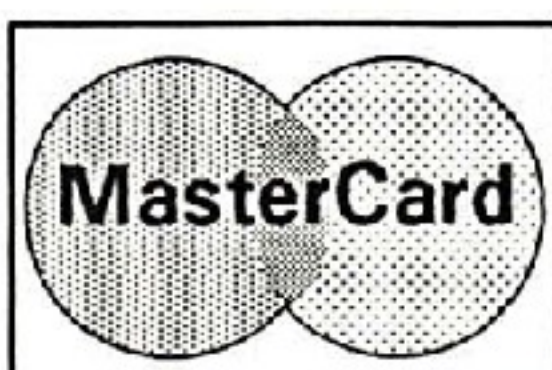
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